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42 pages of tutorials inside!

DESIGN STRONG LIGHTING SCHEMES
Bram 'Boco' Sels demonstrates the power of the gradient map to create powerful lighting

Breaking into the industry
Jan Urschel chats about his journey into the industry and his experiences when he got there

Explore fantasy narratives
Wylie Beckert shares her whimsical sketches of enchanting characters, among fairytale-like settings

Top tips for painting caricatures

Mastering portraits in Painter

Discover how Miklós Földi created a traditional-looking mythological portrait in Painter

+plus

• 10 of the best digital images
• **Create dynamic sci-fi scenes**
• Learn to balance compositions
• **and much more!**

Editor's Letter

JESS SERJENT-TIPPING
Deputy Editor

Welcome to the March issue of *2dartist* magazine!

We love the seamless fusion of reality and mythology of this month's cover image, created by Miklós Földi. Discover how Miklós draws upon his experiences in oil painting to create a soft, painterly effect in Painter while trying new forms and styles in the project overview of his image *Horns* over on page 72!

Also discover that it's never too late to break into the industry as Jan Urschel chats about his eventful journey and the experiences he's gained along that road! As ever, we also have loads of helpful tutorials and insightful articles from industry professionals for you to be inspired by. Enjoy!

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Contributors

JAN URSCHEL
Jan Urschel is a freelance concept designer and illustrator, designing for feature films and videogames. He has worked on projects such as *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Star Wars 1313*.

RICHARD TILBURY
Originally trained as a fine art painter, Richard Tilbury now works as a freelance concept artist and illustrator and has contributed to many notable published works, following his in-house role at 3dtotal.com.

WYLIE BECKERT
Wylie Beckert is a freelance illustrator – her art has most recently found itself in books, card games, and magazines, but is at home anywhere there is a story to be told.

MASSIMO PORCELLA
Massimo Porcella is a freelance concept artist, specializing in designing environment. He has worked on several Italian and foreign projects, and is also a teacher of Environment Design at iMasterArt.
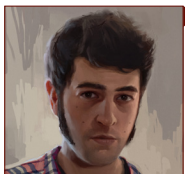
BRAM 'BOCO' SELS
Bram has recently worked for companies like Wyrd Miniatures, Ironbelly Studios and Marauder Film. Currently he's working as lead concept artist for the Belgium based studio GriN.

MIKLÓS FÖLDI
Miklós Földi was the winner of the Rising Stars contest organized by ImagineFX magazine in 2012, and is the holder of the Corel® Painter™ Master title. His works combine traditional and digital painting techniques.

BRUNO HAMZAGIC
Bruno Hamzagic has spent the last eight years working on website production, online games, interactive animation and web art. He currently works as an Illustrator and freelance animator.
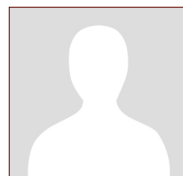
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We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: **jess@3dtotal.com**.
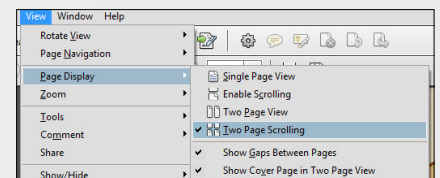
Your Magazine.
Get the most out of it!

If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

Top tips for viewing
For optimum viewing of the magazine, it is recommended that you have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download it for free here: **DOWNLOAD**

To view the many double-page spreads featured in 2dartist magazine, you can set the reader to display "two-up", which will show double-page spreads as one large landscape image:

1. Open the magazine in Reader;
2. Go to the **View** menu, then **Page Display**;
3. Select **Two Page Scrolling**, making sure that **Show Cover Page in Two Page View** is also selected.

Jump to articles
In the Contents pages, we have direct links to all articles within the magazine. If a certain article catches your eye, simply click (or tap on handheld devices) on the page number within the Contents, and you will be taken straight to that article.

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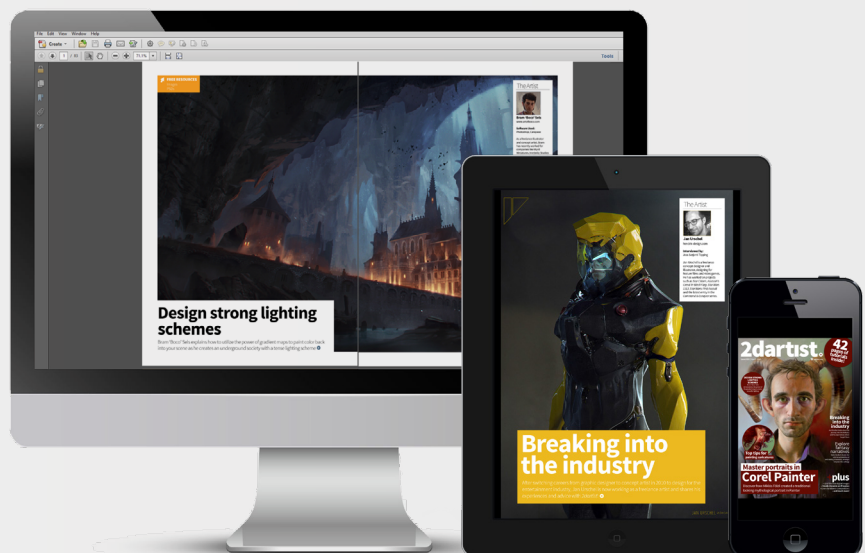
2dartist magazine is available as a downloadable PDF magazine. If you have an iPad or iPhone, you can drag your magazine into your iTunes library – it will automatically add the PDF to your bookshelf in your iBooks app!

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To date, 2dartist has hired over 380 freelancers. We would like that to continue...

Help us to beat piracy.

Since 2006, 2dartist has hired over 380 freelancers to create new and exclusive artwork and tutorials to share with its loyal readers. These artists are just like you: they earn a living by creating art and educational content, and we would like to continue to support these talents for as long as possible.

If you're reading this magazine and you haven't paid for it, please buy your own copy here. It's only £2.99 / $4.85 US and your contribution will help 2dartist to become a stronger brand and offer even more freelance opportunities to the digital art community.

Thank you,

2dartist

The Artist
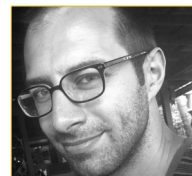
Jan Urschel
hendrix-design.com

Interviewed by:
Jess Serjent-Tipping

Jan Urschel is a freelance concept designer and illustrator, designing for feature films and videogames. He has worked on projects such as *Star Citizen*, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, *Star Wars 1313*, *Star Wars: First Assault* and the latest entry in the *Command & Conquer* series.

Breaking into the industry

After switching careers from graphic designer to concept artist in 2010 to design for the entertainment industry, Jan Urschel is now working as a freelance artist and shares his experiences and advice with *2dartist*! ▶

JAN URSCHEL 25|06|2013

Unlike many artists, Jan Urschel didn't always see concept art in his career pipeline. After a bumpy journey and many different routes, Jan finally settled in the entertainment industry.

After high school, he found himself interested in East Asian and Japanese culture and enrolled in Japanese studies. Based in Munich, Germany it led him to Osaka, Japan where he deepened his studies. During these years he made a living as a self-taught graphic designer in marketing and ad agencies, and also as a freelancer. After graduating with a master's degree, Jan moved to Singapore to continue work as a graphic designer.

However, after ten years he found himself stuck creatively and finally decided to do what he had always dreamed of – which was becoming a concept designer. Jan enrolled in the FZD School of Design and was hired by LucasArts right off the bat!

After a couple of years there and at Ubisoft, where he worked on titles such as *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, *Star Wars 1313* and the latest entry in the *Command & Conquer* series, he turned his attention fully to his freelance business. Jan chats about his experiences of working on big game titles, his approach to his work and what to expect next from his freelance ventures!

"I use very basic tools: pen and paper or standard brushes in Photoshop on a black and white canvas"

2dartist: Could you tell us about your creative process and the software that you use?

Jan Urschel: I can't say that I really have one particular process I follow. It is important to know a few ways that help you finish your paintings on time and in the style required by the client, but I find it equally important to be open to new processes and experimentation.

I predominantly use Photoshop for environment design and ZBrush for vehicles and props. However there is something interesting in using applications for purposes other than what they were originally intended for. Using ZBrush for environments, for example, or using particular Photoshop brushes for textures that the original user did not have in mind at all when he/she created that brush. In the end you have to see the software for what it is – a tool. No different from pen and paper. Don't be limited by it.

2da: What do you feel is the most important part of this process that you like to focus on?

JU: The process that I use, and its most important factors, are fairly straightforward. To get the idea out I use very basic tools: pen and paper or

standard brushes in Photoshop on a black and white canvas. This allows me to keep it simple and focus on the big shapes. After that it's a variety of photo textures and custom brushes that allow me to deliver my work on time.

The key points however, are that you find a process that allows you to reliably and quickly put out high-quality paintings. If you have this in place you can save yourself a lot of pain because the client and you yourself know what to expect. I also like to share this process with my clients before I start the work to let them know exactly what they will get in the end.

2da: You have worked on some big games such as *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Star wars 1313*, can you tell us about some of your experiences of working on titles such as these?

JU: The experience that I gathered from these two titles couldn't be more different. I usually trace it back to the fact that one company is a games company through and through, and the other one is mainly a VFX studio that generates its revenue from merchandise and licensing. At Ubisoft you will face a high pressure environment to get the games out of the door; especially in the *Assassin's Creed* franchise where the game comes out reliably every year.

A game is only ever as good as the team working on it, but I was incredibly lucky to work with ▶

● **An exploration vehicle with figure**

JAN URSCHEL 2013
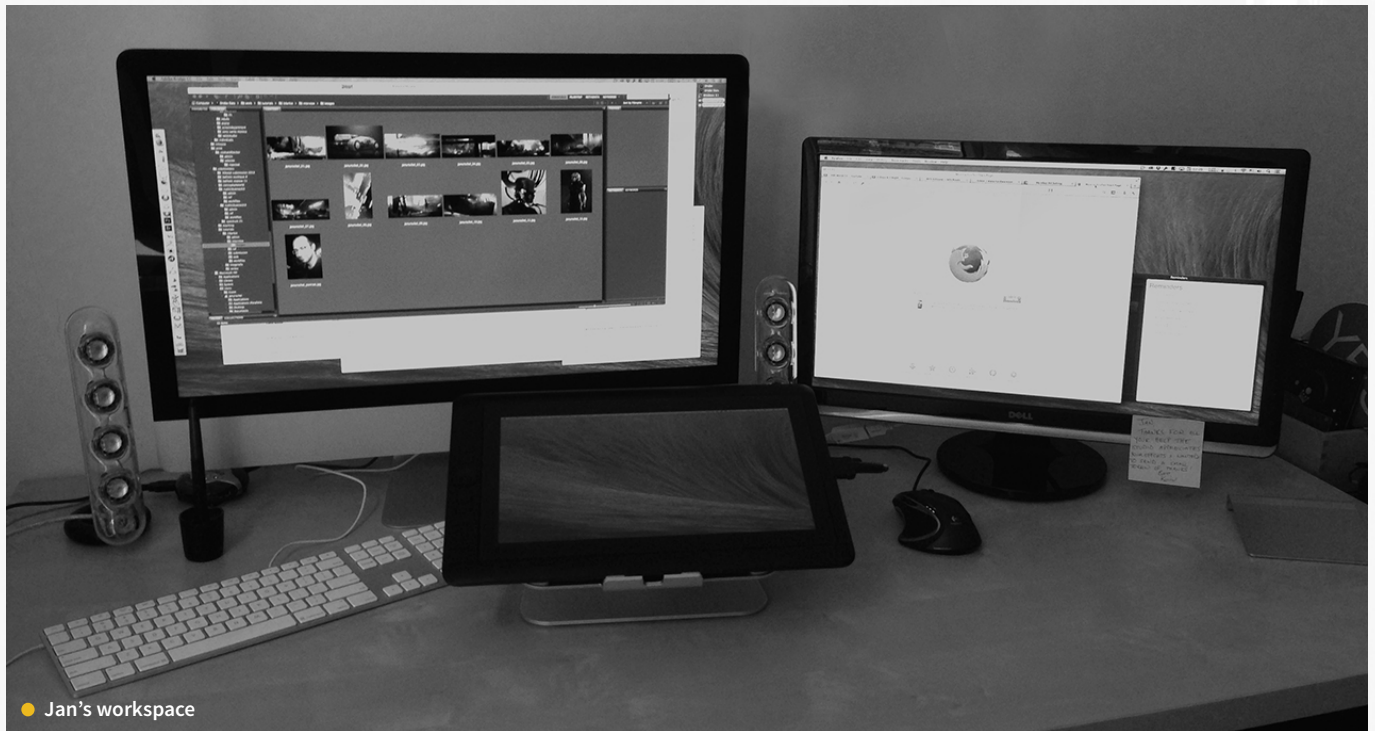
● Jan's workspace
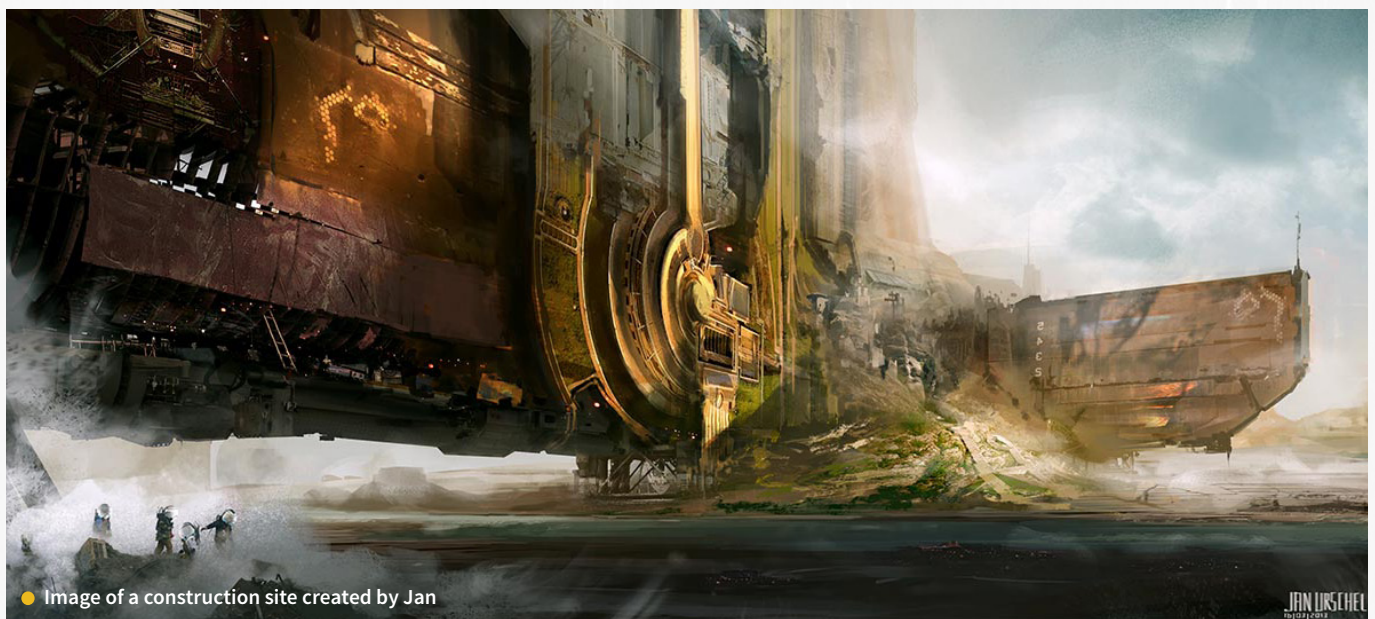
● Image of a construction site created by Jan

two great teams on those projects. Both games were very different in their aspects but equally ambitious in their aspirations. Working as a concept artist on both projects, I feel the main difference was that with Star Wars you really have to be mindful of the design legacy of the movies and the people who worked on them, while with *Assassin's Creed* you have more freedom.

2da: How has working on videogame design changed your approach to your own work? What have you learned during paid work that you can apply to personal work?

JU: Working on videogames has shaped my thinking in several ways. Gameplay is the most ▶

⚡ PRO TIPS
Get out
What you do besides the actual work is just as important, if not more. Get out and travel, read and gather experiences that feed your brain and you will find that your artwork can only be enriched.

Stay healthy
This job requires you to sit long hours often without enough sleep. Make sure to do sports and stay fit. Eat properly and regularly – a sound mind in a healthy body. Furthermore, getting away from your daily design problems will help you to see them in a different light and reflect on them, eventually coming up with better solutions in the end.

Robot reflections created by Jan

An accident site in a sci-fi terrain

Explorers surveying an atmospheric scene

important aspect in a game and the more you keep that in mind while designing environments (in terms of space and player immersion) the more successful your concepts will be, and the more useful they will be to people further down the pipeline. Think about how the player will traverse your environment. Use your props or drive your vehicles.

Furthermore, in many games you can view and interact with any object from any angle and players will find many unforeseen ways to do things with them you never thought about. Therefore it is important to think about the look and functionally of your designs from every angle as well.

The biggest influence from paid work on my personal work is the discipline to finish my work within a certain timeframe, to a preset deadline.

2da: What is your favorite videogame? And how has it affected/influenced/shaped you?

JU: I have to honestly say I'm not much of a gamer. I used to play once in a while, but these days there is just no time. My favorite game therefore is a bit older: *Half Life 2*. It is still the benchmark for me in terms of gameplay, story and design. While I guess it did have somewhat of an affect on me, I find myself more inspired and shaped by movies. My favorite among those is still *Blade Runner*. There is so much to learn in terms of cinematography, lighting and design that it will last for a lifetime.

2da: What has been your favorite project to work on and why?

JU: My favorite project unfortunately has not been released yet. It is a science fiction short movie for which I was the main designer for all the vehicles, props and buildings. Although it was a smaller project, it was a far greater experience than working on most of the big titles. Rather

● **Piece entitled** *Balance*, **created by Jan**

JAN URSCHEL 2013

● **A busy street made by Jan**

◷ Artist Timeline

2010: Changed from graphic design to concept design
2011: Hired by LucasArts
2013: Began working as a freelance artist

"It's not about which school you went to and how good your grades were - it's only about the portfolio and how good your work is"

● A robot bust created by Jan

JAN URSCHEL 2014

than being a tiny part of an 800 man team and never actually talking to any of the decision makers, I got to work closely together with the director of the project. Also, I was hired for my particular style and my ideas and could really bring a lot of these into the project.

2da: Do you have any advice for artists looking to break into the industry?

JU: I often get asked 'exactly how do you break into the industry?' Should I go to a design school or not? Should I focus on this or that? I've seen many people where school really helped get their skills up, but I also know plenty of artists who did it by themselves. Some learn with master studies, some with life drawing, some do only character designs while others focus only on environments.

It doesn't really matter what you choose. It's not about which school you went to and how good your grades were – it's all about the portfolio and how good your work is. If you're not sure what needs to be in a portfolio, just look at the people who work at the company you want to work for and that already have the job you want. If you're not getting close to the quality that they produce, why would the company hire you?

2da: Can you tell us about any of the projects you are currently working on?

JU: Pretty much everything I work on is under NDA at this point, however I've been contributing to the *Star Citizen* game by Cloud Imperium Games, which is a gigantic project helmed by

Chris Roberts of *Wing Commander* fame. I work alongside amazing artists like Emmanuel Shiu, David Hobbins and Ryan Church on some exciting sci-fi designs. I highly recommend checking this project out as it is also pretty unique in terms of the business side, getting its funding from continued crowd-sourcing and investors.

2da: Finally, what can we expect to see from you in the future?

JU: Right now, I'm still settling into the freelance lifestyle, but I'm developing some big plans for

my personal work. I'm also working on some collaborations with other artists which will hopefully come to fruition by the middle of the year (fingers crossed).

On top of that I'm contributing to projects like the *Nuthin But Mech 3* book and other projects that I can't talk about right now. I'm also trying to work on some video tutorials and education offerings. All in all it will be a busy 2014.

2da: Thanks for taking the time to chat with 2dartist! ●

● Garbage trucks in a sci-fi scene

JAN URSCHEL 2013
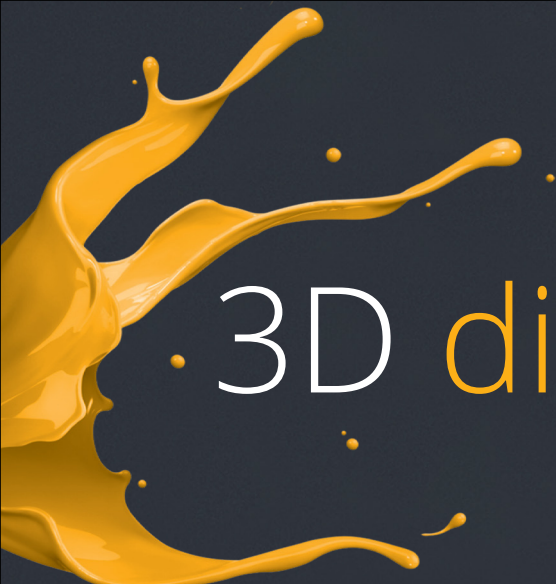
WYLIE BECKERT

Sketchbook

The best illustrations are those that can tell a story well, and the work of Wylie Beckert definitely does that! Wylie shares her whimsical sketches of enchanting characters among fairytale-like settings. Get wrapped up in pages filled with smoke, feathers and other natural elements!

The Artist

Wylie Beckert
wyliebeckert.com

Wylie Beckert is a freelance illustrator – her art has most recently found itself in books, card games and magazines, but is at home anywhere there is a story to be told.

Discover Wylie Beckert's whimsical illustrations inside her amazing sketchbook...

I sketch for a lot of reasons, but the most important is that good illustrations don't just materialize out of thin air. My sketchbook is vital for the brainstorming, planning and visual research that serves as the foundation of a successful image. Time spent sketching is never wasted – every line you draw strengthens your control of the pencil and familiarizes you with the drawing process.

Drawing from life, even if it's just a still life of a coffee cup, strengthens your observational skills. Even if I've seen an object a thousand times, I don't really understand it until I take the time to draw it. By really looking at an object and figuring out what shape it is and what details make it identifiable and lifelike, I'm able to add it to a mental bank of specific, believable objects that I can reference for future work. ▶

This page from my sketchbook served as the under-drawing for my Tam Lin digital painting

01

An illustration for *The Legend of Tam Lin*, created for the Month of Love blog. Pencil and white charcoal on tinted paper, colored in Photoshop – the last stage in the life-cycle of my sketches!

02
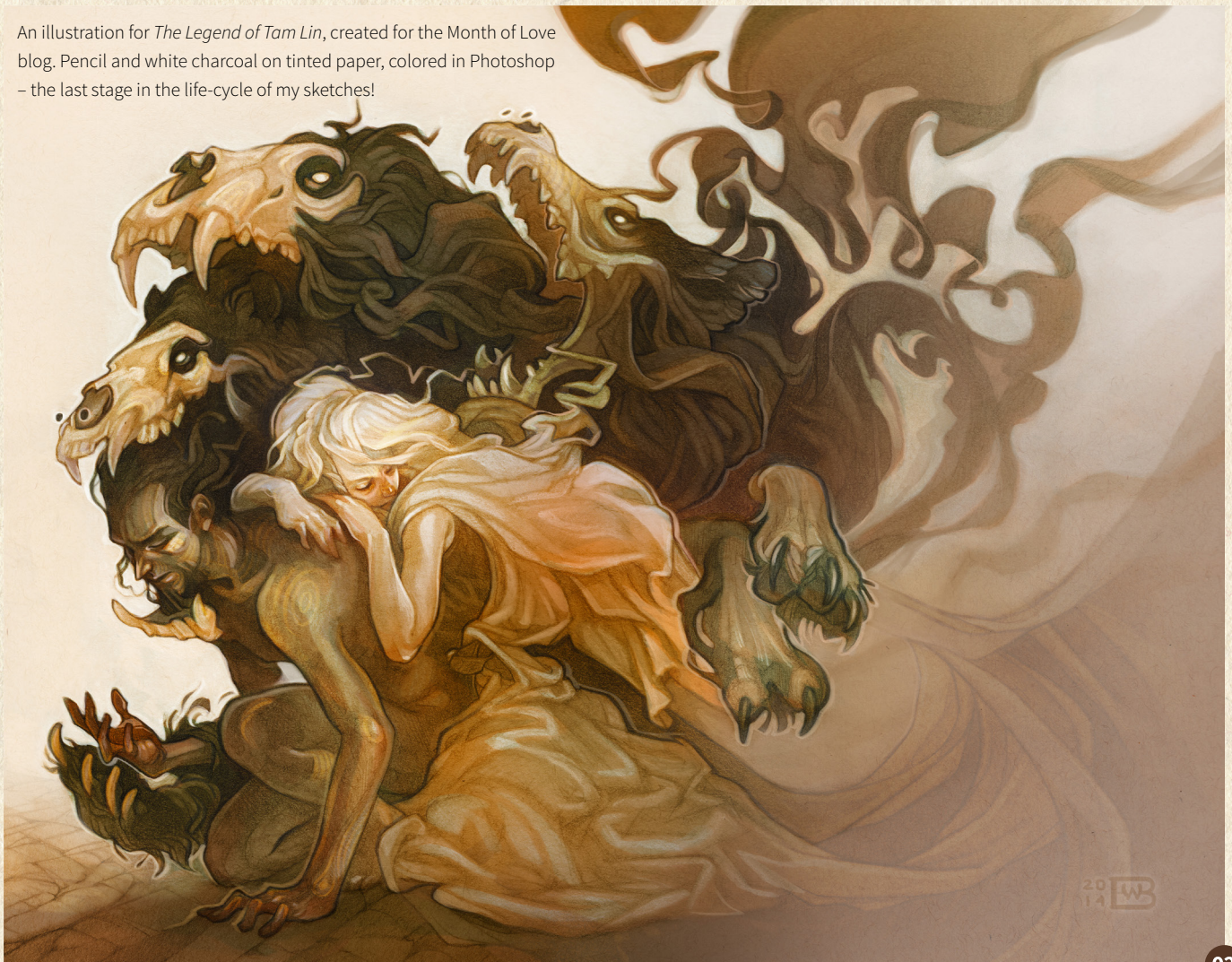
Once you've noticed how a coffee cup's rim catches the light, or how its base sits on a tiny beveled edge, you'll never draw it as a lifeless hollow cylinder again, and your illustrations will be that much more compelling.

My sketchbook is also crucial for trying out new techniques and media. My first few attempts at a new medium are almost certainly doomed to failure, and no one needs their failures plastered all over a five-foot stretched canvas that took all day to prepare. A five-inch painting on a gessoed sketchbook page? Much more manageable! Small-scale practice helps me test the limits of my materials, and gain enough confidence to tackle larger pieces.

Inspiration and ideas

My sketches tend to start with something fairly uninspired, like a face study, or an object from my desk. I'll then see if I can create a story for that object or character. I'll either incorporate elements I already love to draw, like trees, smoke, flowing hair; or challenge myself by working in something new – maybe an animal that I haven't drawn before, or an unusual texture. Browsing through other artists' sketchbooks is always a source of inspiration and helps break me out of a rut when all my sketches start to look the same. ▶

---

03 If I'm short on ideas when I open my sketchbook, my go-to subjects are faces. I love creating characters and building scenarios around them

04 Storytelling and visual puns help keep me interested in whatever I'm sketching. This waitress's workplace explains her sudden transformation and her brood of little owls

05 I like to understand the underlying structure of the things I draw. Building the sketch of an animal over the skull helps ground the image in reality, in a way that mere surface observation can't

04
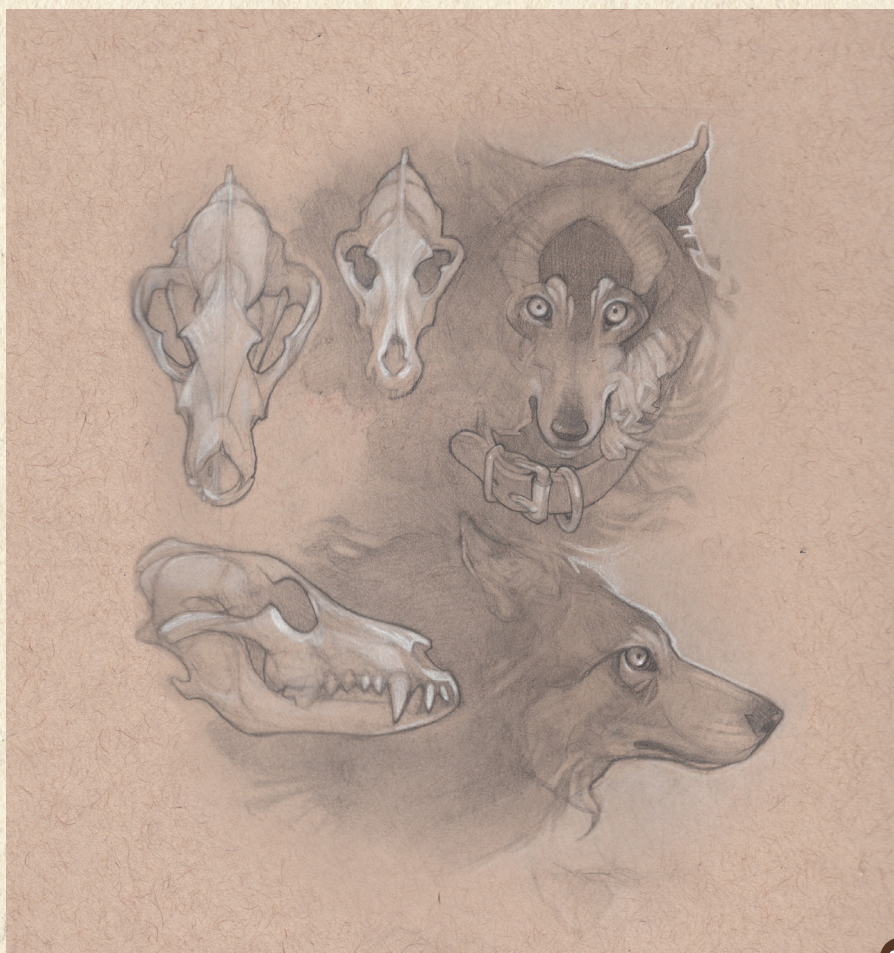
05

Materials

My basic sketching tools are 0.5 and 0.3mm mechanical pencils with standard HB lead. For sketches, I like to work on tinted paper (Strathmore's Toned Tan is a good option) and use a white charcoal pencil to build highlights. If I'm planning to color a drawing digitally, I skip the tinted paper and use white Bristol instead – it allows me more control over the saturation of the finished piece.

For building up mid-tones quickly and easily, powdered graphite (applied sparingly with a brush at the early stages of a drawing, then blended with a tissue) is a great tool.

Sketching techniques

I've never been able to keep my pencil art from smearing, so I've embraced the effect and rub the entire page with a piece of tissue as I work. This gives me a soft base tone which I can pick out with a kneaded eraser or sharpened eraser pencil to define volumes and create low key highlights (Faber-Castell's Perfection pencils are awesome for this!) I find it easier than trying to create immaculate line art, and it makes for some interesting effects. ●
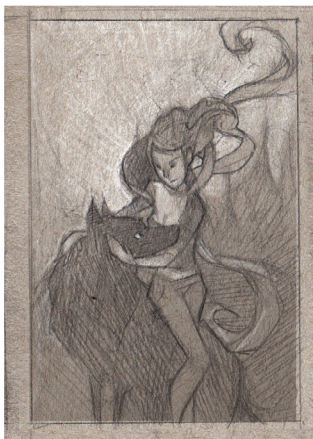
06 An in-progress character from my sketchbook – I try to take advantage of the pencil's natural smudginess by using a tissue to establish a soft mid-tone at the early stages of a sketch

07 Thumbnails are an important stage of image planning for me, and my sketchbook is home to dozens of these tiny drawings

08 A figure drawing I ran with. It's important to build your art skills with all the 'boring' stuff – figure drawing, perspective sketches, still-lifes – but I like to tap into my imagination when revisiting these studies to keep my sketchbook lively
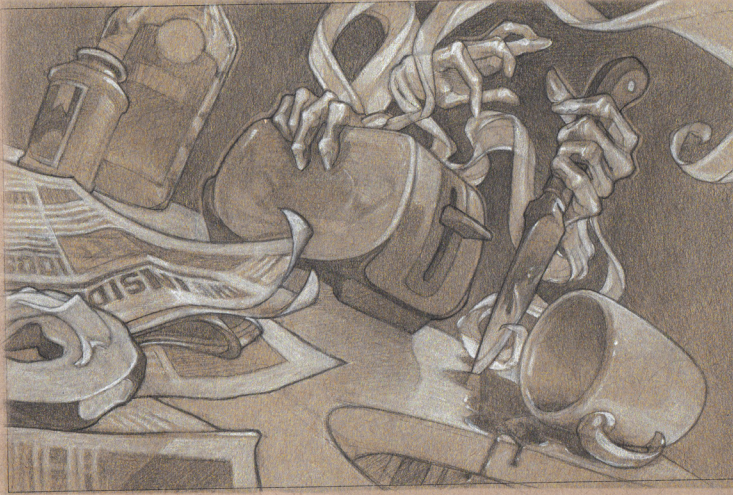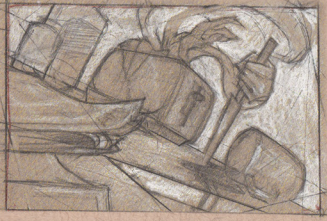
⚡ PRO TIP

Building a mental database

A sketch is a good opportunity to ask yourself; 'What does (a bottle, an owl, a collarbone) really look like?' and find the appropriate reference materials (whether that's photos, 3D models, or life). It might feel like a waste of time to seek out reference for an idle sketch, but doing so will help you build up a mental database of objects and images, allowing you more freedom to create more complex and believable drawings from imagination later. Don't fall into the trap of doing too many 'lazy' sketches – try to use your sketchbook to learn something!

09

09 A haunted toaster and a ruined breakfast. Sometimes adding a little random craziness can make a still-life more fun

10 The early stages of a sketch often aren't pretty – I'm mainly focusing on creating a composition, trying out poses, and nailing down the major elements that will make up the image

10

⚡ PRO TIP
Analyzing your sketchbook

Working as an illustrator, my sketchbook is often the only place where I can create personal art for my own enjoyment. By flipping through my sketchbook and noticing what I've chosen to draw, I can evaluate my goals as an artist. Drawing wizards and magic? I should be pursuing more fantasy work! Lots of nudity and gore? Maybe it's a good time to move away from the children's book market!

My sketchbook is also a good tool for self-evaluation: am I limiting myself by only drawing the same pose, the same viewpoint, and the same types of people? Once I realize that I'm repeating myself, I can start to explore new options

12

13

11 This illustration, created for the ArtOrder's Inspiration challenge, is a digital painting over pencil on Bristol. While I try to plan my images thoroughly at the sketch stage, often additional details will creep into the final piece

12 Another one of my pencil/powdered graphite sketches. This one was for a SmArt School course with Marc Scheff and Lauren Panepinto

13 The final image: a mock cover illustration for Karin Lowachee's novel *Gaslight Dogs* - colored with transparent Overlay/Multiply layers in Photoshop

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Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists and their artwork to adorn the pages of our magazine. If you think you have what it takes, get in touch!

To submit, simply email Jess at **jess@3dtotal.com** with a selection of your images or a link to your portfolio online, plus a little information about you.

We look forward to hearing from you!

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42 pages of tutorials inside!

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Art **Gallery**

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!

Hope
Gediminas Pranckevičius
Software used:
Photoshop CS6
Year created: 2014
Web: gedomenas.com

Melting
Gabriel Romero
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2014
Web: gaboleps.com
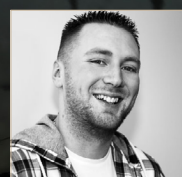
Boudica
Dave Paget
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2014
Web: davidpaget.co.uk

BOUDICA

The Congo Diary
Edvige Faini
Software used:
Photoshop
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Web: edvigefaini.com

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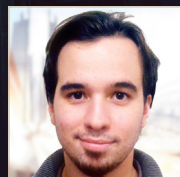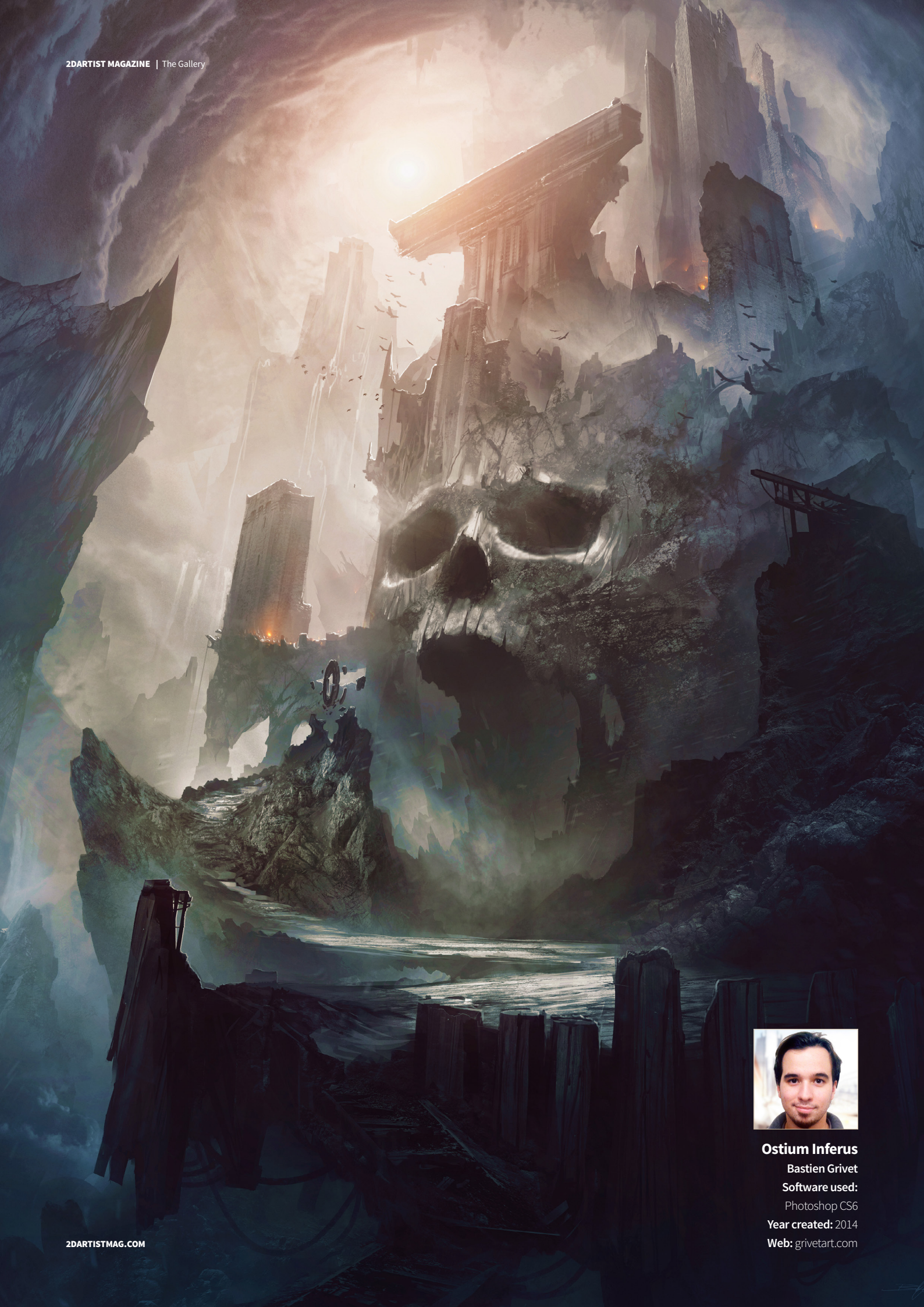
Ostium Inferus
Bastien Grivet
Software used:
Photoshop CS6
Year created: 2014
Web: grivetart.com
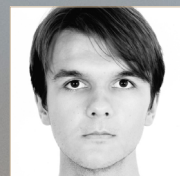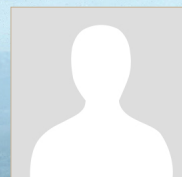
Watermill
Rasmus Berggreen
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2013
Web: rasberg.blogspot.co.uk
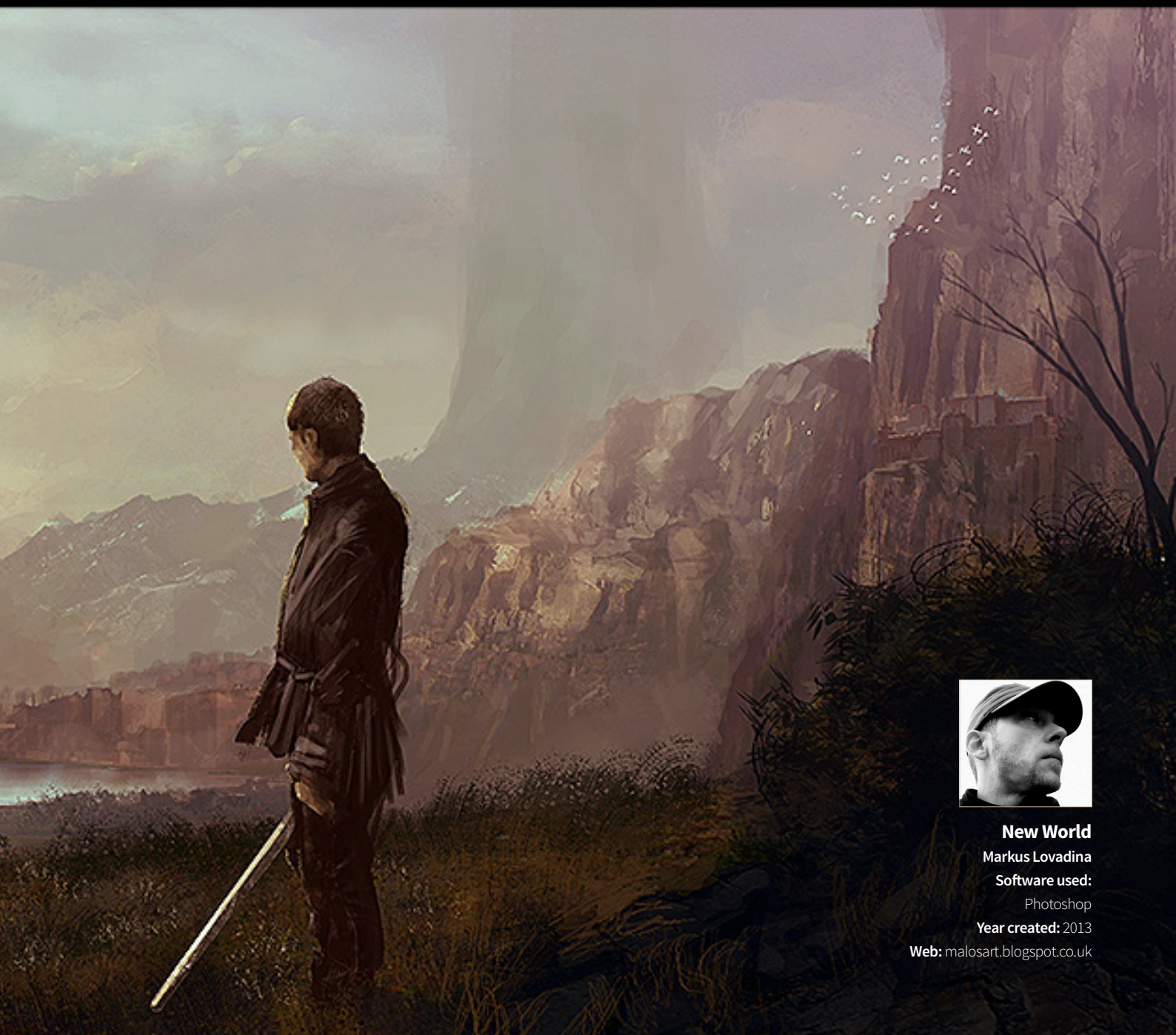
New World
Markus Lovadina
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2013
Web: malosart.blogspot.co.uk

BEAR HOUSE

Bear house
Byzwa Dher
Year created: 2014
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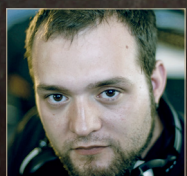
Falconer
David Munoz Velazquez
Software used:
Photoshop
Year created: 2013

davidmunozvelazquez.blogspot.co.uk

The Artist

Richard Tilbury
richardtilburyart.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Originally trained as a fine art painter, Richard Tilbury now works as a freelance concept artist and illustrator and has contributed to many notable published works.

Learn to balance compositions

Richard Tilbury takes a look at the process behind producing a digital painting through step-by-step tutorials, which cover the principal techniques employed in Photoshop to create your own sci-fi themed image. In this tutorial, Richard finishes off the scene by adding in characters to help balance the composition ▶

Balancing the composition of your scene by introducing some characters...

At this point in the image, we can begin to work on adding characters, which are crucial to the composition. In this case, I decide to put one in the extreme foreground, so begin on him first.

01 **Blocking in the figure:** The first stage involves blocking in the general shape and color, which in this case is a green/blue hue, deliberately chosen to contrast with the warm hues prominent throughout the scene. As usual, make sure you consider the lighting

> "With the principal character in place, it is easier to review the overall composition and the relationship between the various parts"

scheme and bear in mind the arrangement of lights and darks. If you look at the initial block-in, the light is now hitting the left side of the arm and helmet whereas the right side is in shadow; something that is maintained throughout the two subsequent phases.

I try to make the suit well-padded with a large scale visor but it looks oversized (as you can see in the middle image here) and so I reduce the proportions, resulting in a slimmer and less hunched astronaut.

By having him point, it also serves to guide the viewer's attention towards the second astronaut who will be placed to the left.

02 **Positioning the character:** Having him cropped at the waist feels a little awkward, so I raise him and give him a more upright stance.

03 **Composition:** With the principal character in place, it is easier to review the overall composition and the relationship between the various parts. I realize that the detail is inconsistent at this point – instead of reducing detail towards the background, I had an area in both the foreground and the background that had been worked on heavily, and a large component that lacked definition in the form of the main wreckage.

04 **Fixing composition problems:** To help balance this inconsistency, I decide to create an area of detail. I begin by adding evidence of a wing of sorts and then use an array of photos to house some mechanical parts beneath it, perhaps suggesting an engine or internal support structure.

I use hand-painted elements to start the process (upper left) and follow by integrating some color-corrected photos (upper right). The photo ▶

Foreground ship is vague

Detailed background

Detailed character

03

04
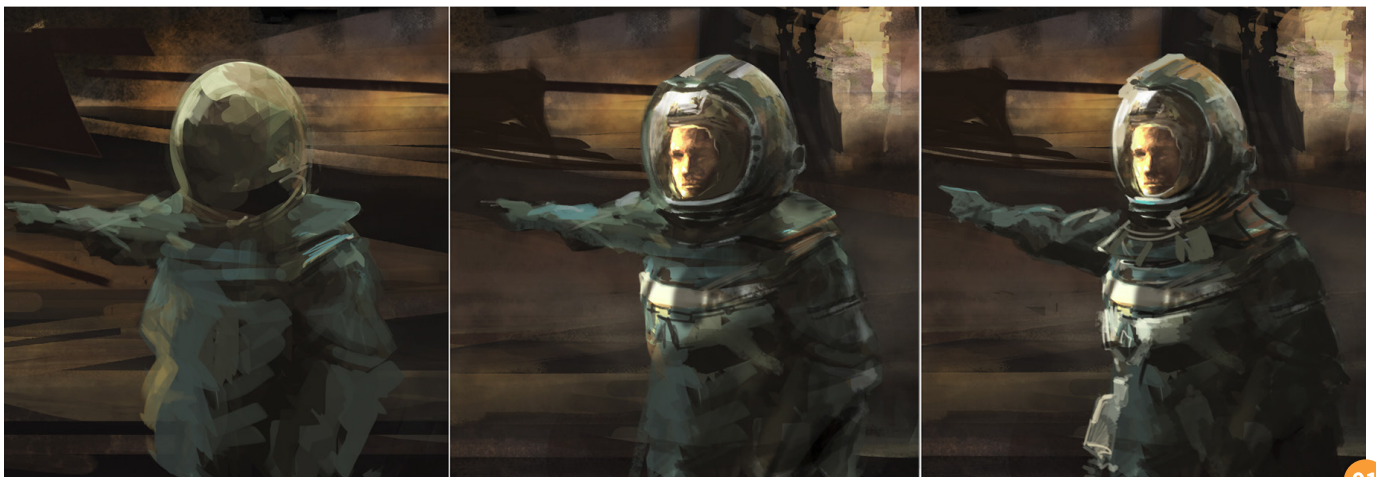
01 The first stages of adding in a character

02 Re-cropping and positioning the character in the scene

03 Problems with the composition that need to be addressed

04 Addressing problems with the composition by refocusing detail

05

Eye focuses on main character first and leads to reflected light & other characters

Use Lasso tool to create crisp edges

Focus on shadows and highlights

Bounce light from ground
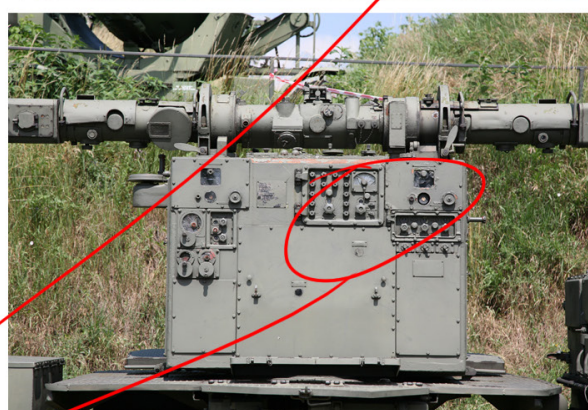
06

sections are then blended in with a brush, paying careful attention to the lighting.

05 **Adding detail:** I use three photographs to add detail, as you can see in the corresponding images. Increasing the detail in this section of the canvas makes a great deal of difference and marks the beginning of the last phase. It is always good to balance areas of detail with less labored parts of the canvas, and in this case I want the right half to be far simpler and more suggestive compared to the left-hand side.

06 **More characters:** The foreground character is used as a device to 'activate' this space and help balance the composition. One remaining aspect is the inclusion of an additional character in the direction that the astronaut is pointing. This is something which will also help tie the left and right sides together and guide the viewer into the scene.
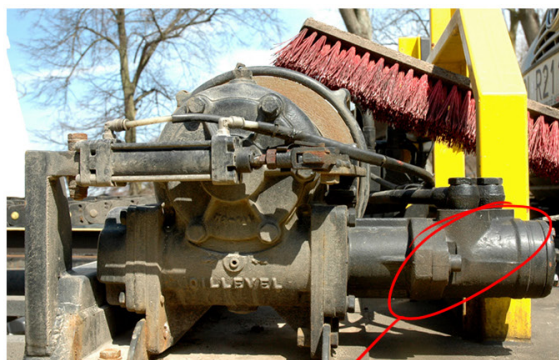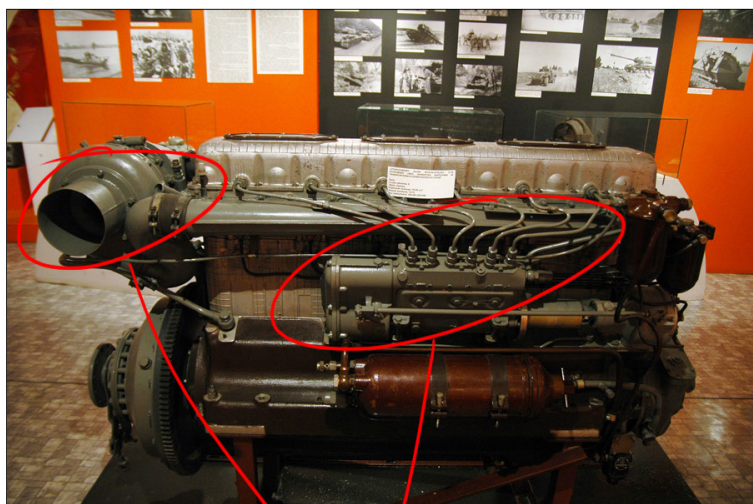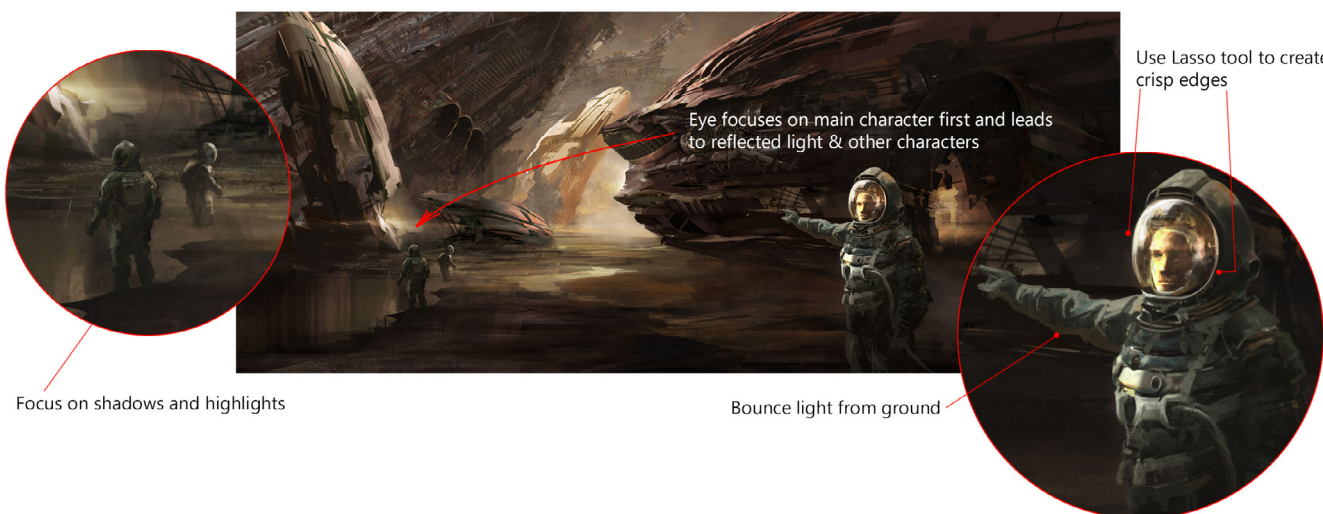
I add two additional explorers approaching the main wreckage and refine our key character, whose right arm is now complete alongside his modified helmet. I create a sharp edge around the helmet using the Lasso tool; you can then paint inside the selection area, invert it and then delete outside it (assuming you do it on a separate layer).

He is the focal point and from here your eye is led to the other two explorers, guided in part by a subtle lens flare where light is reflecting off a metal panel. These characters are composed of a group of light and dark areas to suggest their general shape and spacesuits. When you get a highlight in the right area it is amazing what effect it can have in describing form, even in the absence of any detail.

The composition at this point is now complete and any further work is simply a matter of refining what is already there.

07 **Collapsing layers:** It is helpful to divide your image into layers and break it down into a logical structure that allows you to experiment with areas independently, but it will get to a point inevitably when you want to collapse a few or indeed the entire PSD file. Once done you can apply some adjustment layers to further modify aspects like the color scheme and contrast for example.

So at this point, I collapse everything and then create a new group (icon is located at the base of the Layers palette next to the Delete Layer icon). Within this, I add two additional layers that make up the refinements. There is no reason why you
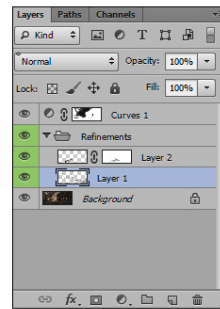
cannot use a single layer or indeed create a whole new set, but at some point you will probably repeat the process.

You can see the image and the corresponding Layers palette with the new group called Refinements (marked green) and a Curves adjustment layer at the top with the mask thumbnail alongside it.

This is used to darken the shaded areas, and by painting into the mask with black, I can prevent the lighter regions from being affected.

08 **Final thoughts:** This concludes the end of the process though no doubt I will look at the image in a few months time and see a number of flaws – this is a scenario that could apply to almost every piece you undertake however. Ultimately there is a point at which you must decide to stop, and sometimes the temptation to continue can prove difficult to resist, but this is simply another step in the learning process. ●

05 Using reference images to inspire detail in the image

06 Working out the best composition by adding more characters and a subtle lens flare

07 Collapsing the layers and adding a few final adjustments to complete the image

08 The final image

RICHARD'S
INTEGRATING PHOTOS
CHAPTER 03 CAN BE SEEN IN **ISSUE 098**
2dartistmag.com

Design strong lighting schemes

Bram 'Boco' Sels explains how to utilize the power of gradient maps to paint color back into your scene as he creates an underground society with a tense lighting scheme ▶

The Artist
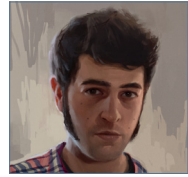
Bram 'Boco' Sels
www.artofboco.com

Software Used:
Photoshop, Carapace

As a freelance illustrator and concept artist, Bram has recently worked for companies like Wyrd Miniatures, Ironbelly Studios and Marauder Film. Currently, he's working as lead concept artist for the Belgium-based studio GriN on their upcoming game title *Woolfe: The Red Hood Diaries*.

Discover how to create powerful lighting and speed up your workflow...

Building up values in black and white has a lot of benefits. The most crucial one being that it lets you concentrate on the important things like composition and value without being overwhelmed by color and color relationships. The downside of working this way is that when coloring an image, it can easily become very monochromatic and you tend to have less happy accidents or those sweet-looking color accents that fit perfectly in a painting but look out of place up close. Still, for more intricate scenes, I prefer to start out in black and white. Gradient maps can then be a very powerful tool when coloring such an image.

In this tutorial you'll learn how to create a strong lighting scheme by assigning different colors to different values. You'll learn how this technique prevents your image from becoming too monochromatic and that it saves you the time of manually having to paint colored details back into your meticulously built-up black-and-white textures. With great glee you'll discover how a gradient map combined with a mask can make it feel like you're painting with magic paint. You'll find out how to quickly create rock textures by creating custom brushes from a photograph, and as a bonus you'll learn how to easily set up a three-point perspective grid using Epic Games' free application Carapace.

01 **Laying down the law:** When painting an environment I almost always start out with a perspective grid. I find it takes away the stress of a blank canvas and it saves me the time of having to correct mistakes later on. It really is like laying 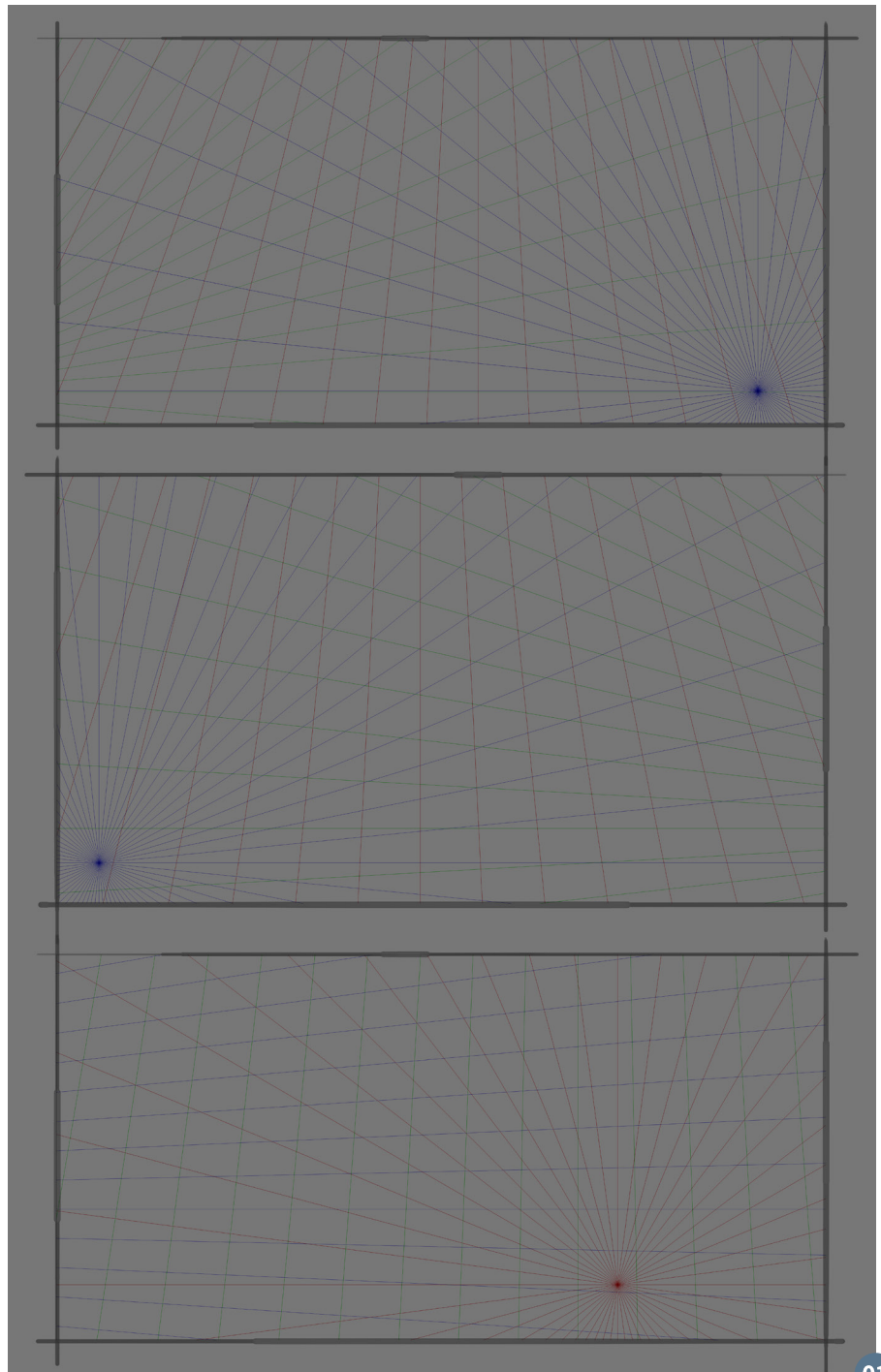down the law – you create a grid and stick with it. Everything in your scene will have to obey the rules you've first set out.

01

⚡ PRO TIP

All hail the powerful Carapace

Carapace is a free-to-download application from senior environment artist Warren Marshall at Epic Games. With a few clicks, you trace two perspective lines in an image and Carapace then calculates the vanishing point and creates a perspective grid based on those lines.

In this example I reverse-engineered one of my thumbnails to find the vanishing point of the wall. If I would now hit Ctrl+C in Carapace, open a new document of the same size in Photoshop and hit Ctrl+V, the perspective grid would appear with a perfect fit. Simple but really effective.
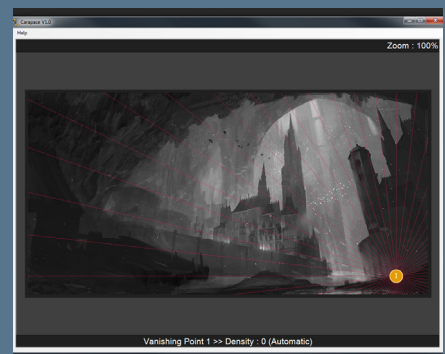
A great application to get a solid perspective grid is Carapace from senior environment artist Warren Marshall at Epic Games. He developed a free-to-download app (just Google 'Epic Carapace') that lets you place (or trace) lines for which it then creates a grid and vanishing points. A great trick is to find an image that already has great perspective and paste it into the program. You just trace a few perspective lines in the photograph and Carapace does the rest. You'll have an amazing and accurate perspective grid that you can copy and paste into Photoshop in no time.

02 **Black-and-white thumbnails:** Since this was going to be a subterranean environment, I wanted to use a low horizon line, making the viewer look up into the immense cave. As usual I do a few thumbnails to get my mojo up and to try a few compositions out.

I choose to create three entirely different grids instead of copying the first and trying to create a different environment in it. The reason for that is to avoid creating too similar environments, and really force myself to try things out instead of being lazy and going with the first sketch that feels good.

To create the illusion of it being an underground environment, I decide to cut off the top of the composition with the roof of the cave. I also used a diffuse light source coming from the background rather than the foreground.

03 **Picking the right one:** Choosing a thumbnail is not always easy. Sometimes you have the advantage of an art director that gives his or her two-cents and helps you pick one, but in this case I got to choose myself. I decided to let it rest a few days so I could look at it with a fresh eye. I got into the habit of always starting early on an assignment, and by doing that it gives me the advantage of being able to let it rest.

In this case, when looking back at the thumbnails after a few days I immediately discarded the third one, on account of it being too static and cluttered. Eventually, I pick the first one to move forward with, mainly because I like how ▶

01 Three perspective grids for three different thumbnails

02 Black-and-white thumbnails lit from the back with a diffuse light source

03 The thumbnail chosen: sharp towers that contrast the rounded cave
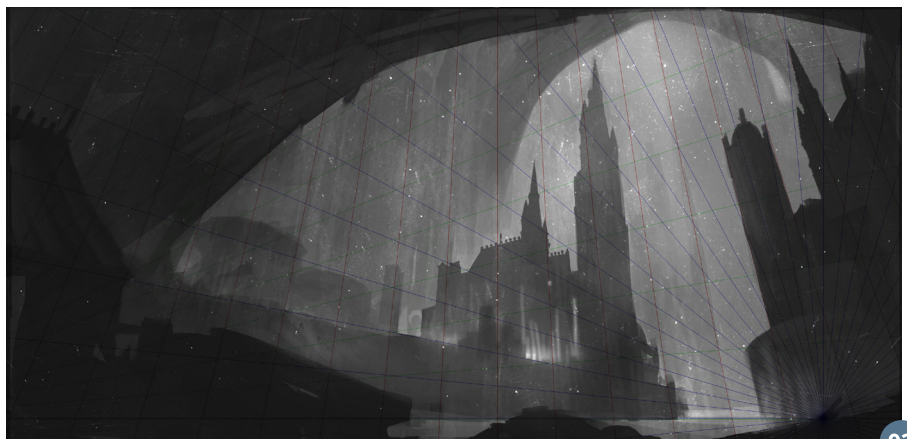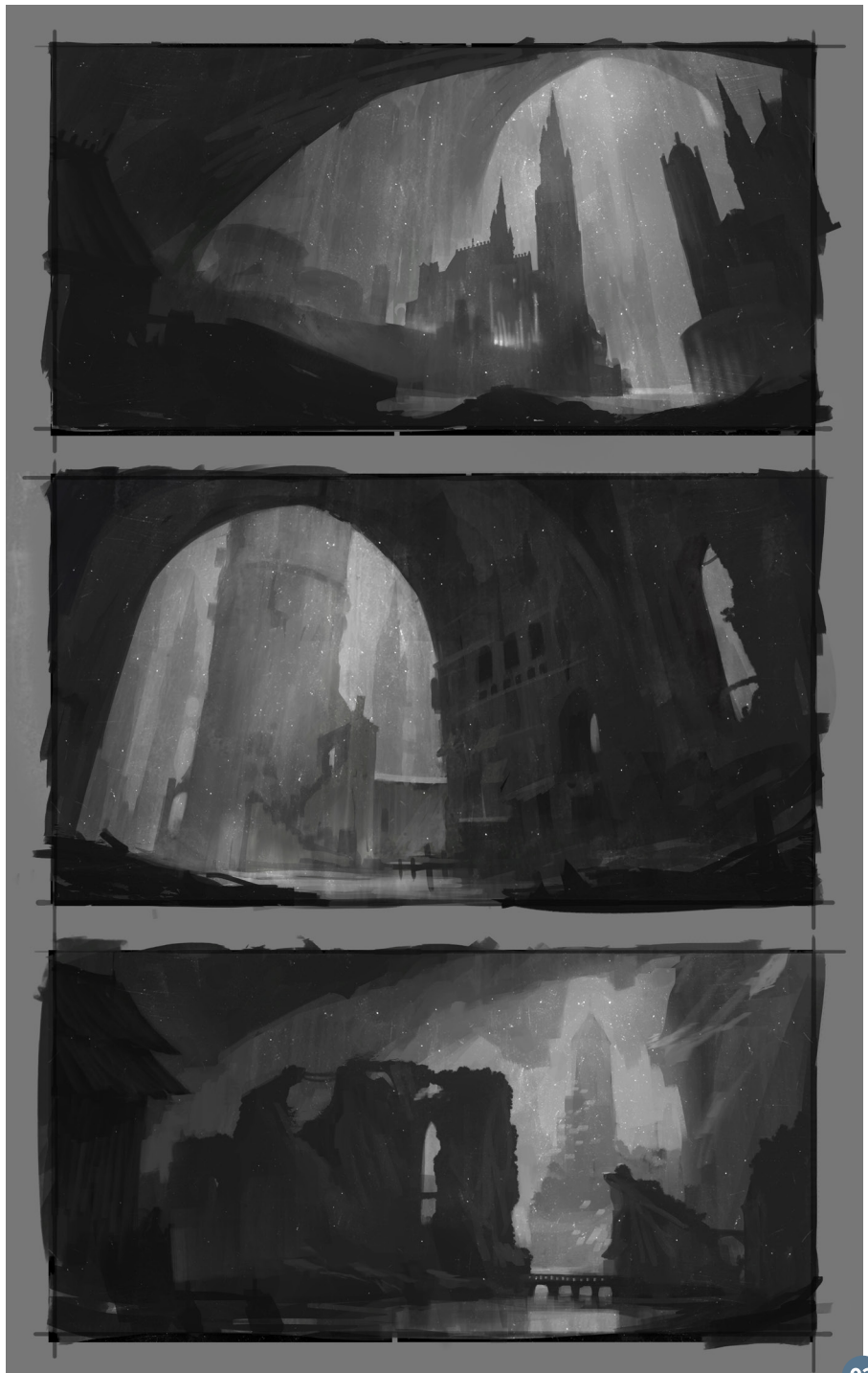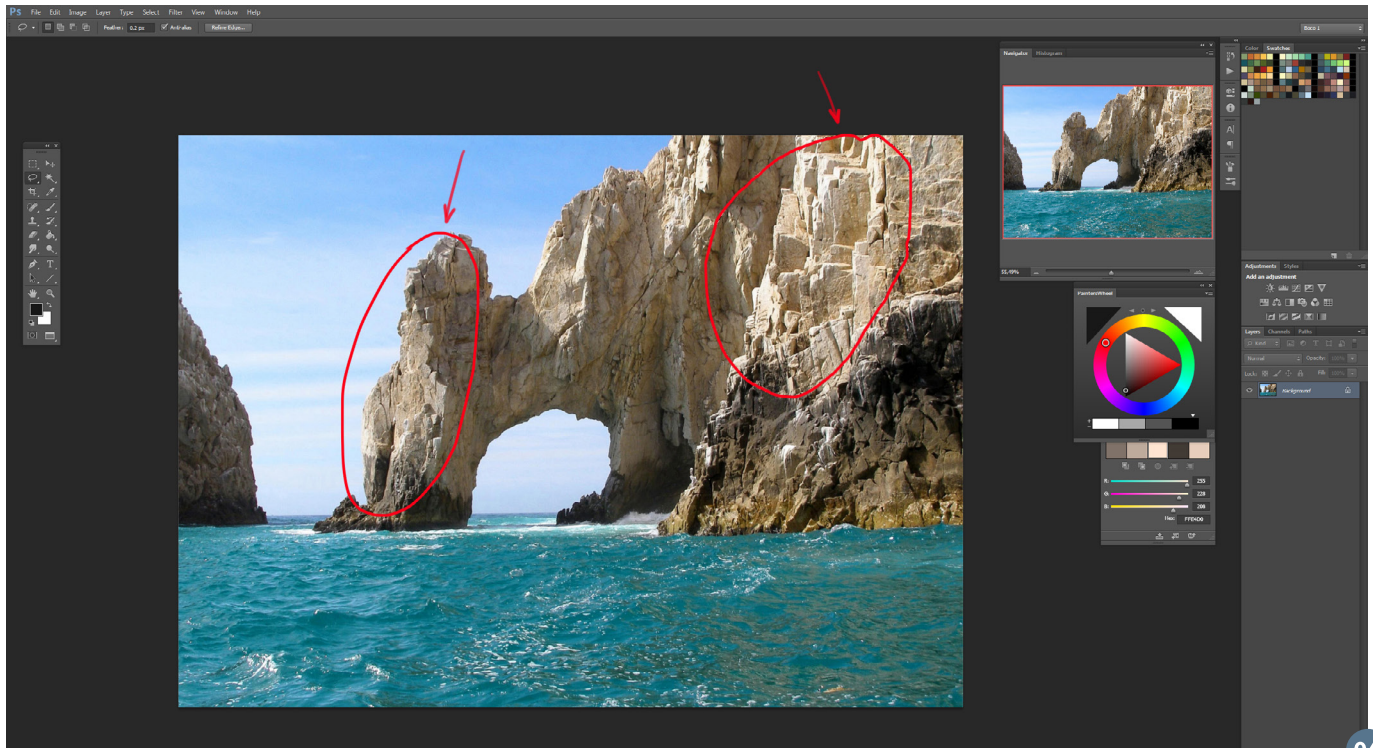
04
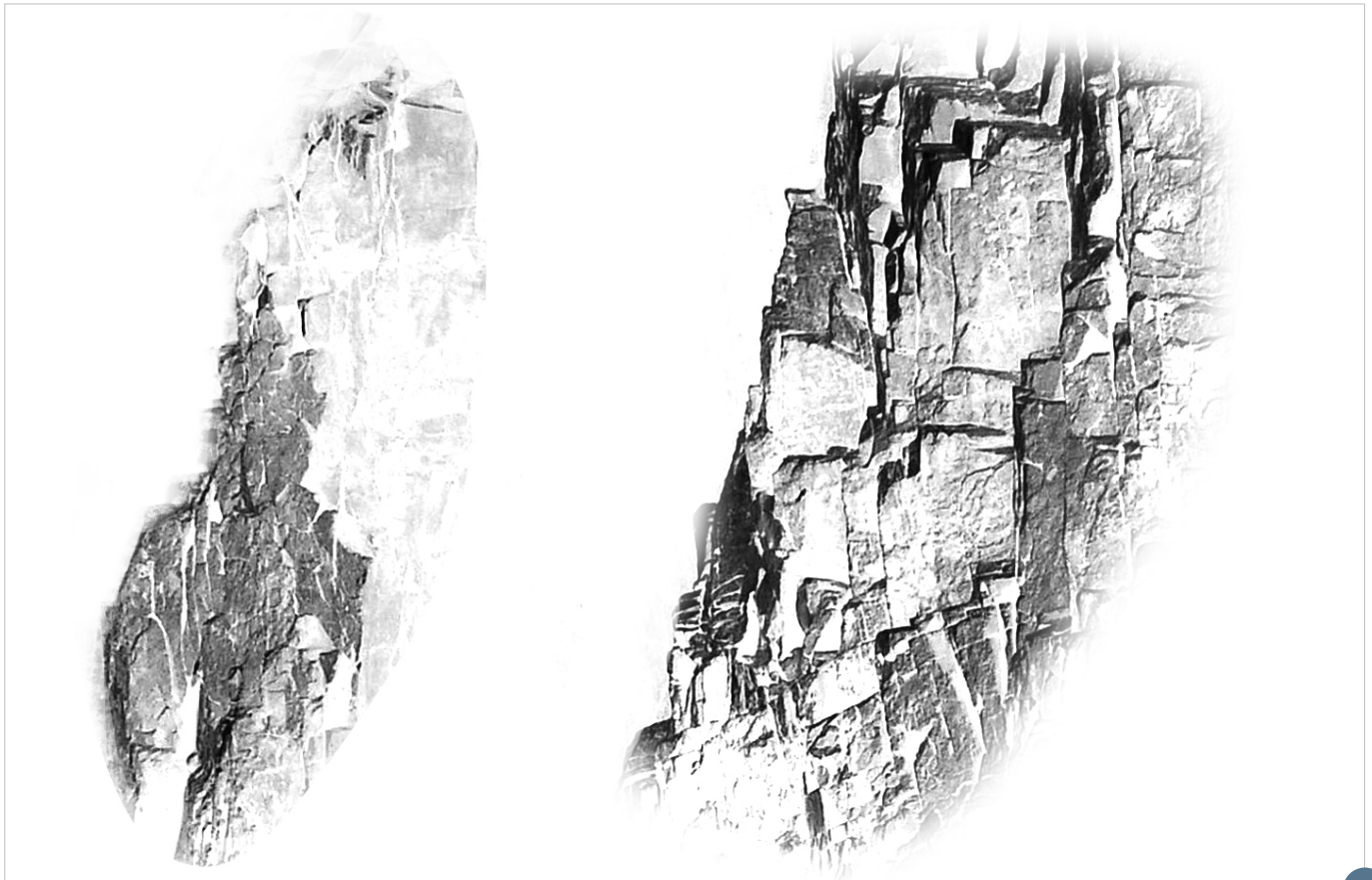
04a

the straight lines of the walls contrast with the rounded walls of the cave, and how the sharp towers shoot upward into the sky, making the environment feel a lot bigger.

04 **Rock solid brushes:** To give the cave some extra believability, I opt to create some custom brushes from a cool photo I found on the CGTextures website. Another option would have been to copy and paste a few parts of the photo and place them on an Overlay or Multiply layer, but I figure the shapes in the picture are so clean and strong that they might be useful in later environments too.

I decided to include them in my brush library. The trick to using bigger brushes like these is not to use them as a final texture, but to use them as an under-painting and then manually paint all the nooks and crannies on top of it. Doing that is a lot more labor intensive, but it makes your painting look so much more authentic. And besides, it's

05

06

the ideal time to listen to an audio-book since it's like putting your stylus on automatic pilot.

05 **Photo texturing:** The basic layout of the city was already set out, so now it was just a matter of filling the silhouette up with buildings and façades. Photographs can really help with that, but I always try to keep the overall level of detail in mind. Just pasting in an image and leaving it unchanged can really screw up an image. Photographs obviously have an insane amount of detail in them, which can be hard to recreate by painting alone.

Since I plan to actually paint 75-percent of the image (like the rock textures, the water and the background) I need to tone down the detail in the photographs to resemble my brushstrokes in the rest of the painting. You can use filters to do that, but personally I prefer to manually paint over and erase parts of the photograph.

06 **Leading the eye:** An important line in the composition is that of the wall of the pier. It cuts right through the image and leads the viewer towards the city and the ship. To contrast with the randomness of the cave I choose to give the wall a repetitive texture. Doing that has two big advantages. First off, it amplifies the depth perception, because the repetitive pattern becomes smaller towards the background which tricks the eye into thinking it's farther away than it

actually is. And secondly, each section of the wall points towards the top vanishing point, making ▶

04 Creating brushes from a photograph found on CGTextures

04a Some of the brushes used to create the under-painting of the cavern walls

05 A first layer of photographic textures, focusing mainly on the primary focal point: the city

06 Working on the wall of the pier, leading the eye of the viewer towards the city
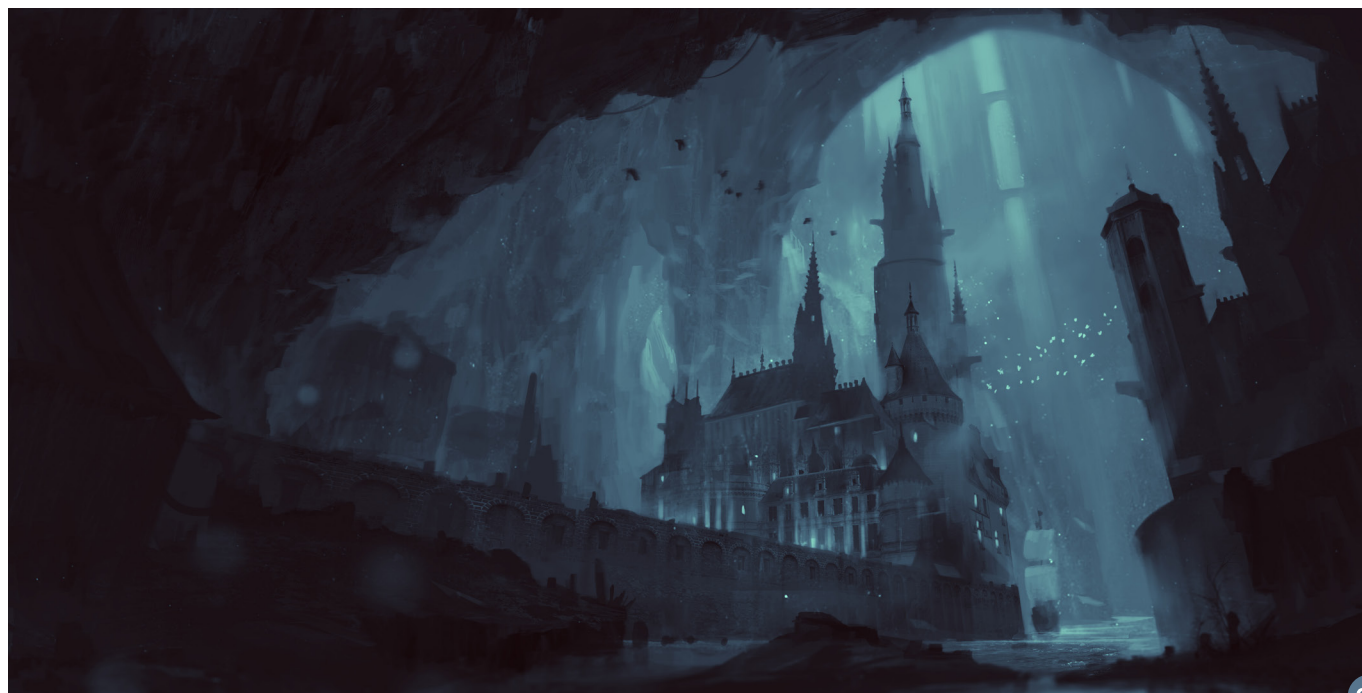
07

08

the perspective easier to read and in extension pushing the cave and the towers up some more.

07 **Finally, some gradient maps:** Because it was a cave scene, I chose to tone the background a cold blue. Using a gradient map to do this gave me full control over what values of the image got what colors. (See the boxout for more information on gradient maps.)

Another method used quite often is to add an Overlay or Soft Light layer and paint the color in on that, but I find it's unnecessarily laborious because I'd have to paint a second time over parts I already meticulously planned out. In this
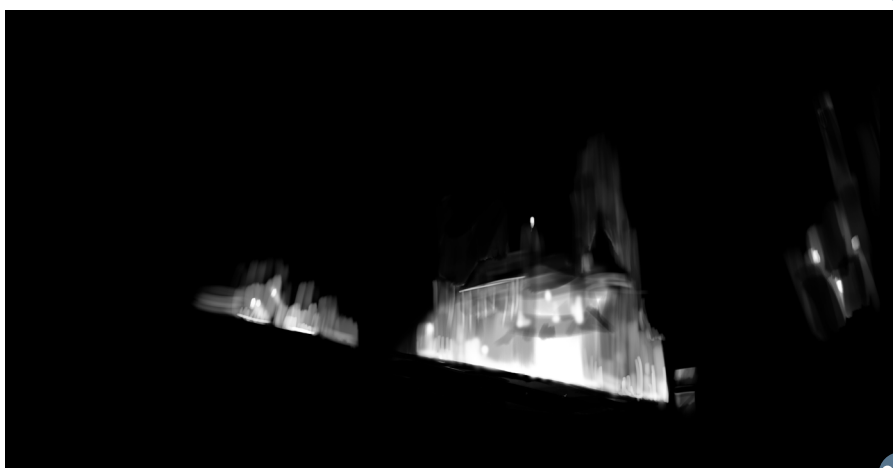
08a

> **"To contrast with the cold light at the top of the cave, I chose to give the city a warm upward light"**

case for instance, if I used a plain blue overlay layer the entire image would have been toned blue and I didn't want that. I wanted the shadows to be more desaturated and warmer than the mid-range, and I wanted the high values to have a tiny bit more cyan in them. Without gradient maps, I would have had to select those parts manually.

08 Painting with light and magic: To contrast with the cold light at the top of the cave, I chose to give the city a warm upward light. An incredibly fun way to do that is to create another gradient map with a small brownish shadow range but intense yellow highlights. You'll see that the whole image turns to a blazing, overexposed yellow mess, but if you add a layer mask to the adjustment layer and invert it everything turns blue again.

Now (with the layer mask selected) you can use a white brush to literally paint the lights on. Of course, the intense yellow will only come through on the lighter parts of your black-and-white painting, so sometimes you have to go back to the original painting to manually brighten up the parts you want to receive most intense yellows.

09 Boosting the light with overlays: Only using gradient maps usually isn't enough though, so I use Overlay layers and Soft Light layers to boost the light even more. With warm reds and oranges I went over the spots where the light is most intense, like in the windows, or over the beams that shine upward. On a few

⚡ PRO TIP

The magic of gradient maps
Simply put, a gradient map does this: you create a gradient, the adjustment layer turns your image to black and white and then replaces the value range of that image with the values (and colors) of your new gradient.

The colors on the left side of your gradient will replace the shadow side of your image; those on the right replace the highlights. In other words, you can directly assign a color to a certain value. In this case, for instance, I wanted to keep the shadows of the cave warmer and more desaturated than the rest, so I put a warmer desaturated blue on the left side of the gradient. Of course, if I would have put a lighter color there the shadows in the image would also have become lighter.
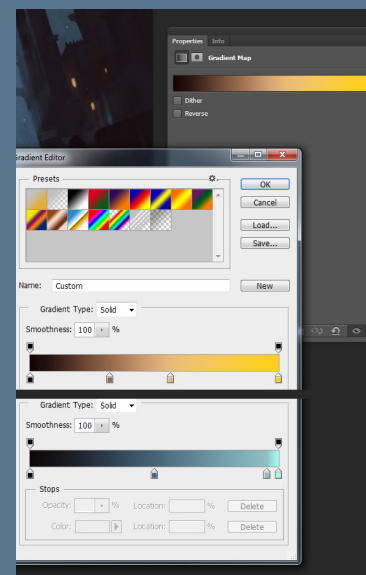
spots like on the walls and the tower to the right I used Normal layers to paint in the reflection of the light. At this point I also decided to crop the image a little, and removed the house to the left because I felt it competed with the more important parts of the image.

10 Finalizing the image: Before finalizing the image I do a last round of detailing, adding a few more bats and birds, touching up some of the foreground rubble and adding some fog here and there to hide unnecessary edges and to add to the mood in general.

When I was satisfied with the result I merged everything together on a new layer and added a few effects on top. I used a High Pass layer to

accentuate the straight lines and details, and I used Tilt Shift to blur the top and bottom ever so slightly. Finally I added a noise layer to give the image some extra grittiness. And there you have it, a cosy underground city that I sure would love to visit! ●

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08 By using two different adjustment layers and layer masks you can really bring an environment to life

08a The mask of the gradient map that colors the city

09 Adding basic light with gradient maps, and boosting with Overlay and Soft Light layers

The Artist

Bram 'Boco' Sels
www.artofboco.com

10 The final image, after adding a few effect layers like high pass, noise and tilt shift
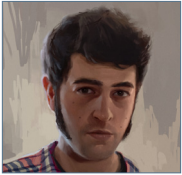
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The Artist

Bruno Hamzagic
brunohamzagic.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Bruno Hamzagic has spent the last eight years working on website production, online games, online and interactive animation, web art direction and animation. He currently works as an Illustrator and freelance animator.

Top tips for painting caricatures

Creating caricatures allows for a lot of experimenting through the distortion of your subject, and in this tutorial, Bruno Hamzagic shares his creative approach. Through research, lighting and composition, Bruno demonstrates his unique process of creating a caricature ▶

Learn Bruno Hamzagic's techniques for creating amazing caricatures...

This tutorial will cover creating a great caricature illustration. Like other art manifestations, caricature doesn't have a 'right' way of doing things, but there are some things that artists can try to do and/or avoid to produce a unique and creative approach.

In commissioned work, artists often don't have endless opportunities to portray someone in a caricature; in this case the briefing will make up the most part of this task. On the other hand though, if the caricaturist is doing a personal work or a humor piece for some exhibition, there will be huge opportunities for experimentation. In my opinion, experimentation is the key to achieving a nice result in a caricature.

For this reason, I think that the most important part of any caricature project is researching and gathering references and rough drawings, regardless of the final medium that the artist will choose to showcase his ideas. In a digital environment, as in the case of this tutorial, we can take advantage of the Select, Drag and Rescale parts of the drawing in any part of the process.

Don't be ashamed or lazy – try! Only by trying will we be able to really see if some idea isn't cliché or an interpretation made thousands of times before.

01 **References:** Generally, a good beginning is to study the person to be caricatured. It's nice when a caricature becomes more than a distorted portrait, resulting in a drawing that tells something about the personality of the subject.

Watch video references showing the subject speaking and doing anything inherent to his/her behavior and/or occupation (when possible), and good imagery research can really help you make composition and graphic choices. It's also important to read about your subject, try to know a little bit about his/her life. With all the social networks that we have today, this isn't difficult!

For this tutorial, I choose to portrait a teacher and great friend of mine, Sergio Nesteriuk. He is university professor, screenwriter and screenplay, film and animation projects consultant.
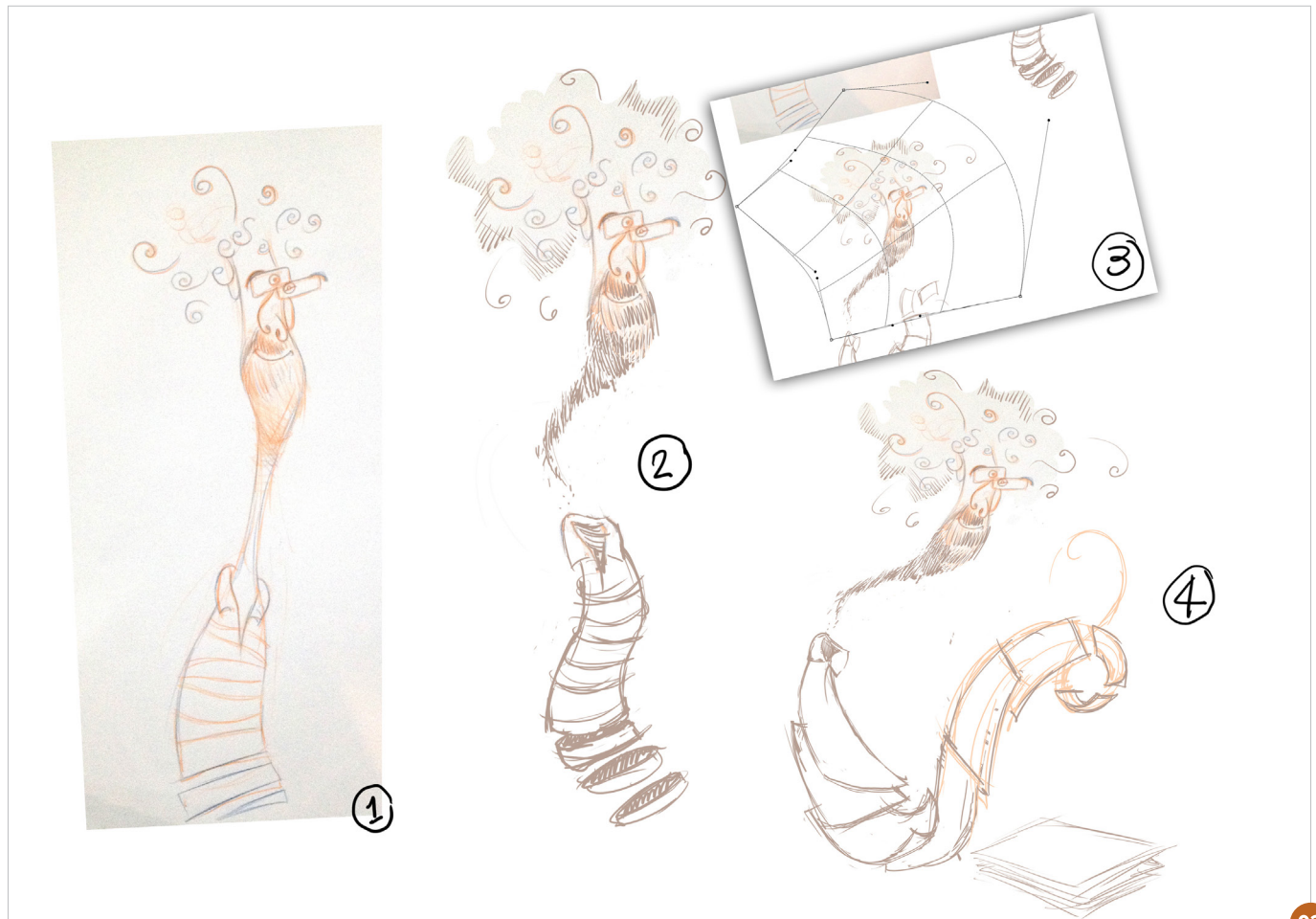
01 A selection of video shots and photographs to log Sergio Nesteriuk's countenance and characteristics

01

02 First roughs: At first thought, it could be cool to simply try and distort the physiognomy of the subject, registering his appearance and physical posture. Above that though, it's important to spend some time trying to find some idea to drive the composition. We could probably get stuck at this point for some time, and often I'll spend a couple of days here (when possible) – in my opinion, this is a natural part of the caricature creation process.

In this illustration, I begin with a handmade drawing, though you can use anything to help you test your ideas. I take a picture of the drawing with my cell phone and continue moving, distorting and rethinking the composition in Photoshop. A nice tool in Photoshop is the Transform tool, under Edit > Transform > Warp. This way you can easily reshape parts of your drawing, which at this point don't need to be refined.

One idea that makes me happy is to have Nesteriuk turning into screenplay papers, which is a little obvious, but graphically interesting.

03 Finally some ideas: It isn't possible for me to say when or via which steps our ideas will flow, but it is possible for us to detect whether we are satisfied with these ideas.

Showing sketches to people and getting feedback from friends (artists or not), helps us to know if our drawing is understandable and funny.

In my case, I always bother my wife and brothers, asking 'Who is this?' and 'What do you understand about what he/she is doing?'. I won't give the answers and so if the answers

don't come from them it probably means that they either don't know the subject, or you need to try some other approach. Sadly, the second alternative is often what happens. After this, I decide on the final rough.

I'm now satisfied with the idea that Nesteriuk will become screenplay pages that become a

movie reel. In this case, it isn't necessary, but all the elements I refer to can be based on found references. This process will bring a solid base to our final illustration.

I gather some references for the elements and the composition. With my cell phone I take a picture of a paper montage as the Nesteriuk screenplay body and Google some movie reel references.

04 **Refining the composition:** At this point I redraw parts of the caricature, separating them to play with the composition. I don't see any problem with making use of tools like Select, Transform, Cut and Paste, Warp and so on when finding a nice composition arrangement in your illustration. Furthermore, taking advantage of Photoshop layers is very helpful during this kind of task.

Now is a good moment to concern myself with the silhouette and line action. I usually avoid overlapping parts of the silhouette as it has difficult readability, and I try to get an interesting flow with the overall line action. This second concept particularly, can make the final composition much more enjoyable.

The last thing here is to create a margin border, to avoid claustrophobic impressions (if we don't want to cause this kind of feeling) and unexpected losses.

05 **Base colors:** After the composition step is done, it can be easier to flatten the file to the minimal number of layers possible. Too many unnecessary layers makes the painting process painful and unintuitive. Always save versions of your file to easily recover previous states. Your choice of color palette can tell the viewers a lot about the personality of the subject too. Nesteriuk is a great intellectual individual
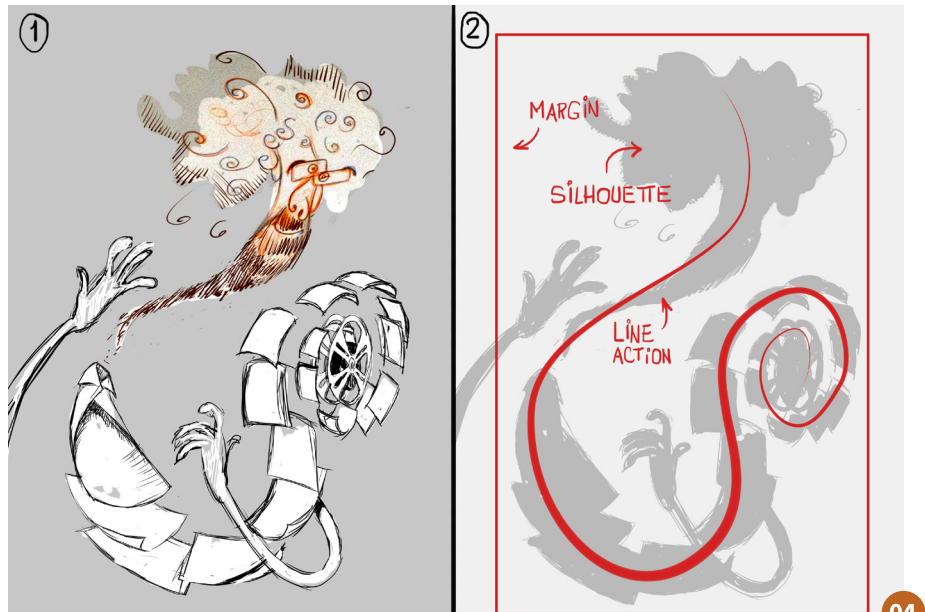
and has a very refined sense of humor. His overall countenance is peaceful and staid. Desaturated colors can bring up his temperament. Using hue and saturation adjustments (Ctrl+U) and simple selections, we can play with the color properties to find the best bases for painting.

The caricature edges and shapes aren't refined yet, but it can be helpful to create layers to serve as temporary selection masks (you can easily press Ctrl+click to make the selection). Another temporary resource is to create an Adjustment Layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer) to calibrate the base colors.

A good color value contrast can be established by creating a Desaturation Adjustment Layer above all the layers and turning it on and off to check the scene. If you notice some level correction is needed, Ctrl+click the selection mask and press Ctrl+L to adjust the levels of that area. This way, the color palette gradually appears.

06 **Painting the light:** In my caricature style, I usually create unreal atmospheres based on not-so-logical compositions. I always ▶

02 1: Pencil and paper drawing. 2: Digitally manipulated rough. 3: Use of Warp Deform in Photoshop correcting the curvature deformation. 4: Composition

03 The final rough drawing and reference image for the paper body

04 The final composition and an analysis of its composition

05 Adjusting the color levels to suit the personality of the subject

KEY LIGHT

RIM LIGHT

RIM LIGHT

KEY LIGHT

06

LIKENESS IMPROVEMENTS

HARD ROUND BRUSH WITH TRANSFER CONTROLLED BY PEN PRESSURE

MORE FOREHEAD

PROMINENT EARS

MOUTH OPENED

①

②
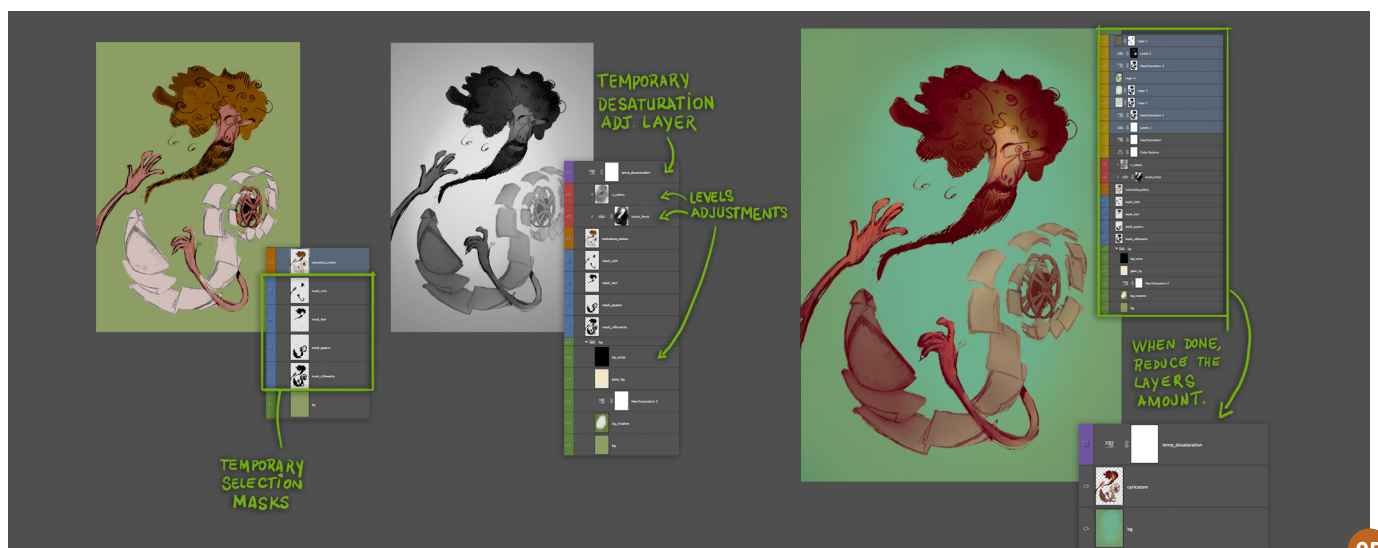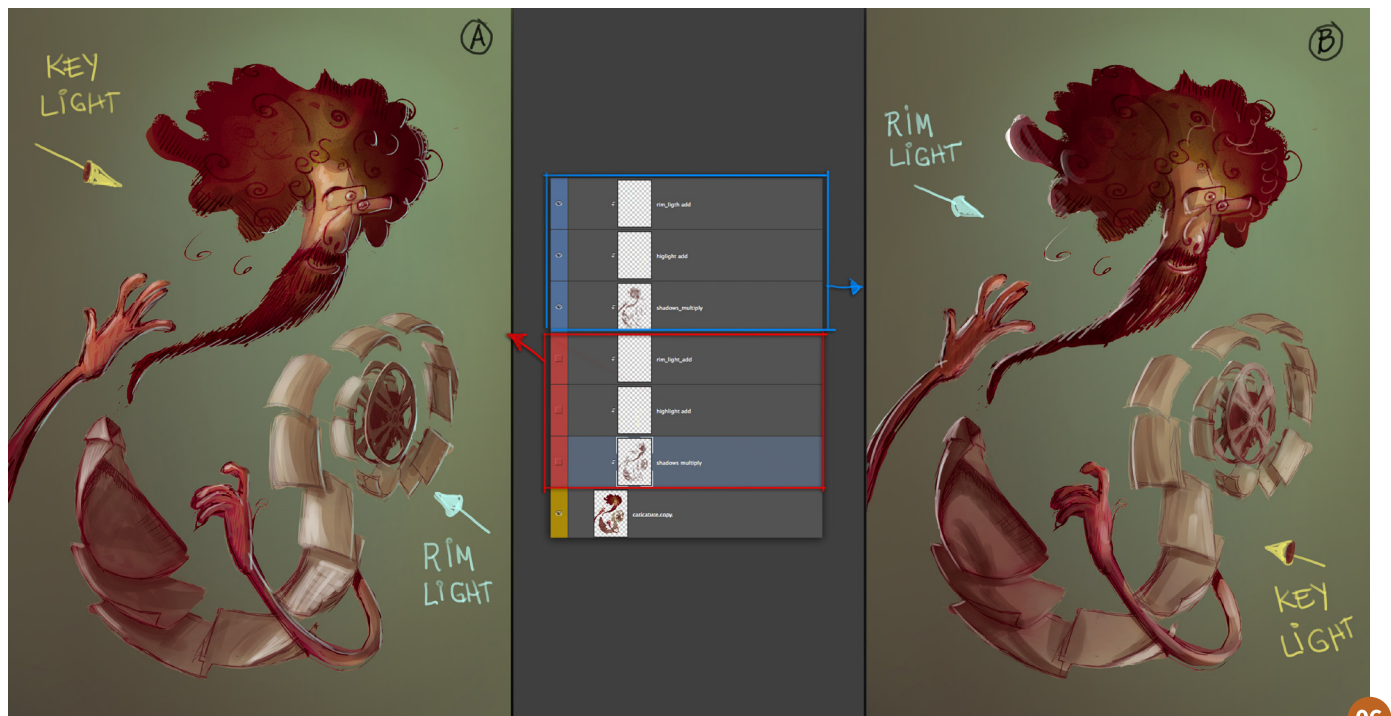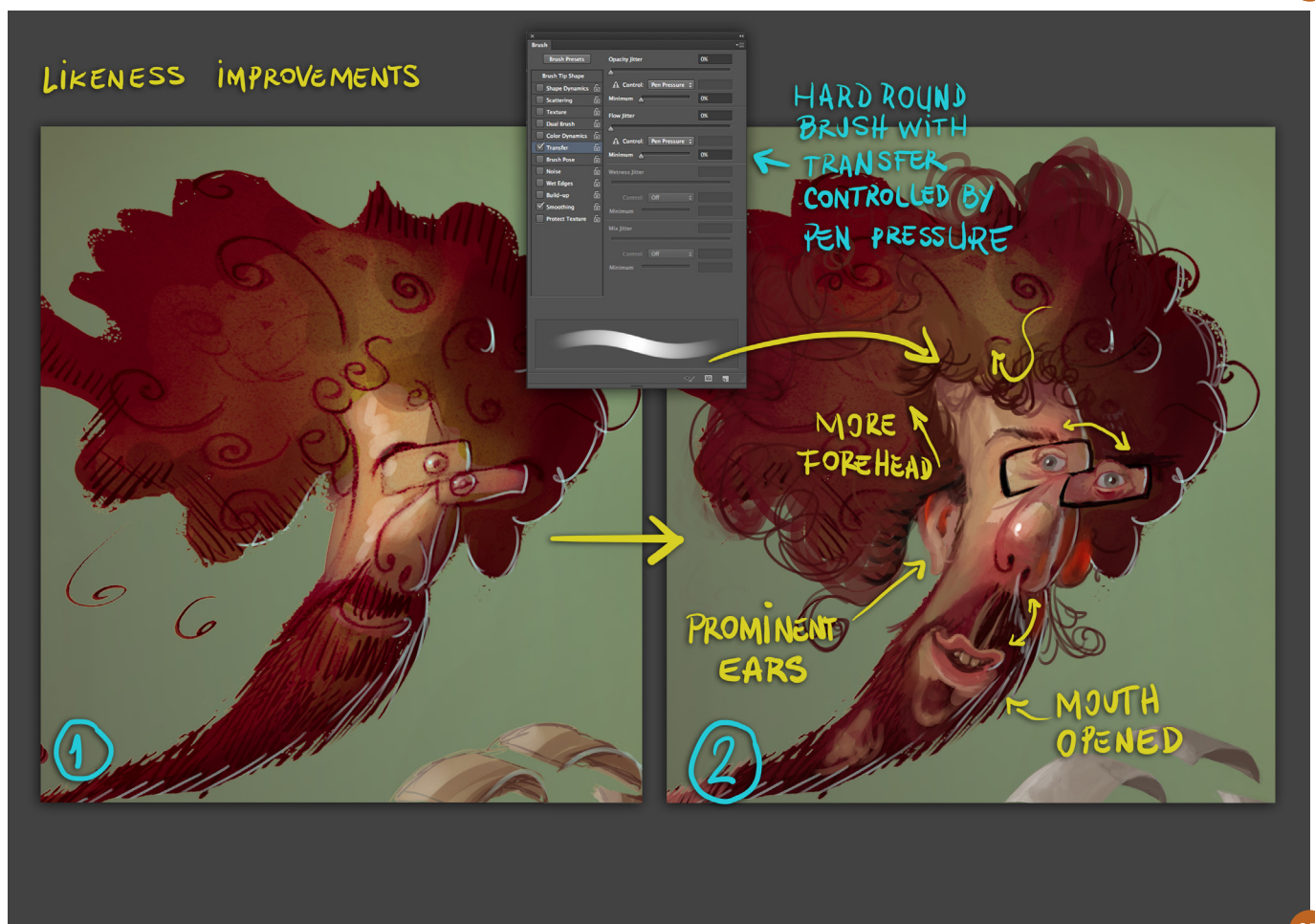
07

put aside some time to find the most appropriate lighting. When one of the photo references of the subject has nice lighting, I try to start from there. If not, I go to a light reference website. One good suggestion is **www.photomatters.org** – check

out the 'Light Matters' section. To test some light alternatives, I create layers above the caricature layer: one with Blend mode with Multiply for shadows, others with Linear Dodge for the highlight and rim light.

The purpose here is to make a quick test and see which one works better for our visual story. I prefer a key light coming from the upper-left side because this brings better highlights to Nesteriuk's face and less to the other elements.

EQUALLY GROWING DETAILS

MORE CURLY DETAILS

IMPROVED HANDS SHAPES

BACKFACE SHADOW

HIGH VALUES ON DIRECT LIGHTING

TRANSLUCENT EFFECT
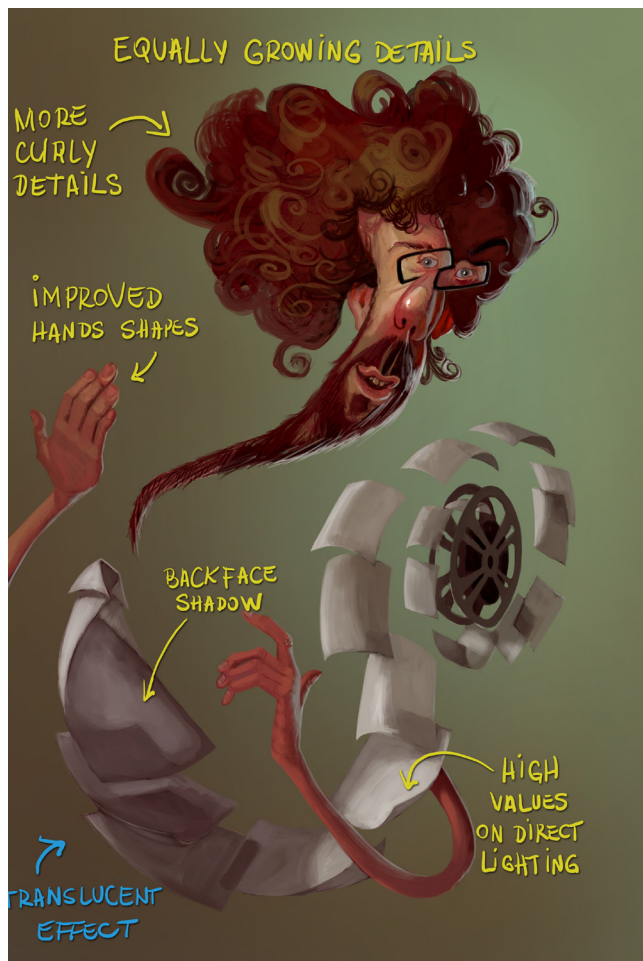
BETTER EDGES AND SHAPES DEFINITION

BEFORE

AFTER

07 Improving likeness: Reviewing the likeness after all this structuring can be a lot more peaceful when the entire illustration looks like it's working well. We've already made all the composition choices, so now we'll start the detailing phase. At this point, it can be useful to have two windows with the same file in Photoshop (Window > Arrange > New Window for 'your_file.psd'): one to see the complete illustration and the other to zoom in and paint details. Again we can reduce the amount of layers so we don't encumber the operating system.

In this step, we'll give our attention to the face, respecting the original appearance of the subject and the relation between the various face parts. Nesteriuk is a little bit cock-eyed (I hope he doesn't read this!) His nose is relatively rotund and points upwards; his mouth pushes down, giving space to the mustache of his beard. His overall face is lengthy – his curly hair is very present in his countenance.

Most of these characteristics were already laid out in the initial drawing, but now it's time to improve them. Using a hard, rounded brush with the transfer property controlled by the pen pressure, we can pick the colors already achieved in the image (with the Brush tool selected and

by pressing Alt+left mouse button) and refine the caricature details. This pass don't get rid the brushstrokes appearance.

08 Overall edge & shape improvements: When we have different kinds of materials and details to draw, it's common to spend a lot of lazy-time looking at the unfinished illustration. One thing that I learned was to both grow the illustration and stop to think before each task. Some things need more research and/ or more work.

In the case of this caricature, I spend some time observing papers against the light to try to reproduce the papers translucent effect. Anyway, the illustration needs to go on, so observe, take notes and move on to drawing! ▶

---

06 Two light sets tests. Between both images is the layer configuration of the PSD file

07 Comparing the likeness improvements: before and after

08 Refining the image and building up detail as a whole

⚡ PRO TIPS

Plan your break times

The creative process is very personal and is ultimately related to how we make things work in our heads. Some artists that I know need breaks all of the time. Going away and coming back after some time is an interesting trick to refresh your eyes.

My advice is to do some drawings right after your imagery research, making use of those first impressions and ideas, and then have a break. When you're back, you can look over the spontaneous drawings you made earlier and rethink the possible approaches you can make.

Avoid zooming in

This will prevent you running into illustration details in a moment that you need to be sure about the total impression of the scene.

Try to divide the detailing phase into steps and don't cross large zoom intervals, for example, painting at 50% zoom and then suddenly painting details at a 500% zoom. Two or three intermediate zoom steps can help to accelerate the painting process and allow you to have more control over the results. The general rule here though is to refine the edges and shapes to later turn into small details.

09 **Detailing:** Custom Photoshop brushes always help accelerate the process of improving detail and save the surface and pen tip of our tablet. Combining custom brushes with the Smudge tool makes it possible to mix the colors with interesting patterns and add some texture to the drawing.

In my opinion, one of the most powerful features with Photoshop brushes is Shape Dynamics > Angle Control > Direction. Turning this feature on allows the direction of our brushstrokes to drive the shape rotation of our custom brush tips. This can, for example, help to register the direction of the skin texture and therefore bring more volume to the illustration.

When using the Smudge tool, it's nice to increase the spacing between the brush tips (Brush Tip Shape > Spacing) letting the tool work faster and reducing the dauby results. The hair and beard become much easier tasks through using custom brushes. In this case, I add some Angle Jitter and Opacity Jitter to create more natural results.

The screenplay pages need some text written with the screenwriting formatting to help the audience identify this element. I get a print of a screenplay page from a personal project, duplicate it, flip it horizontally, reduce the opacity and blur it to messy the letters and make the text unreadable. I just want the overall feeling of a page, not an actual text.

To position the pages over the drawing, I use the Warp Transform tool (Ctrl+T+right click > Warp) and deform them to achieve convincing shapes, setting the layer blend mode as Multiply.

10 **Post adjustments:** The last thing I do with the final illustration, even when I think everything looks fine, is to create adjustment layers to refine the values and colors and highlight areas. This can increase the feeling of depth and diminish the value of the movie reel and the pages near it. All the light areas can be highlighted by making a selection (Select > Color Range) and selecting a highlight sample color with a high value of Fuzziness. You can use this in
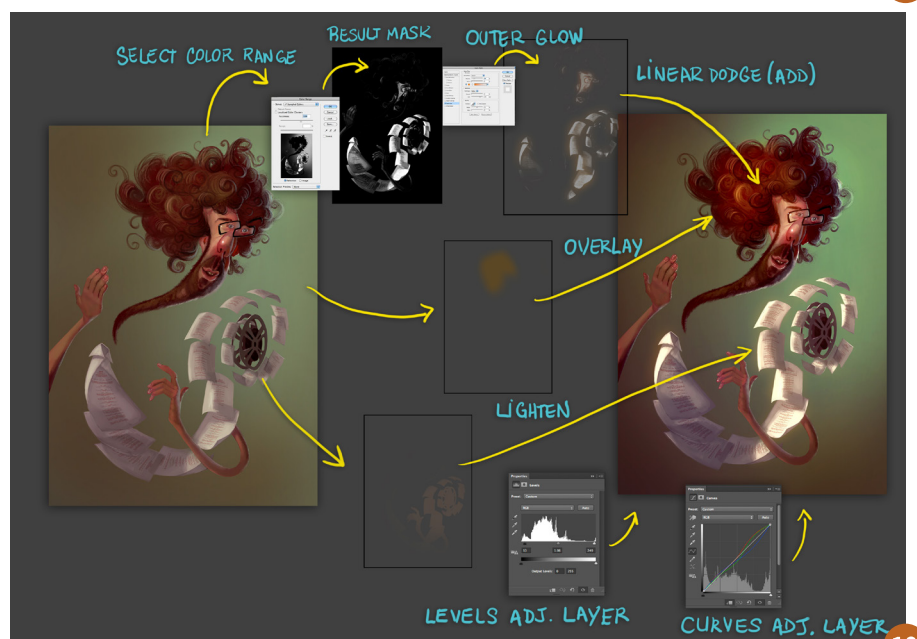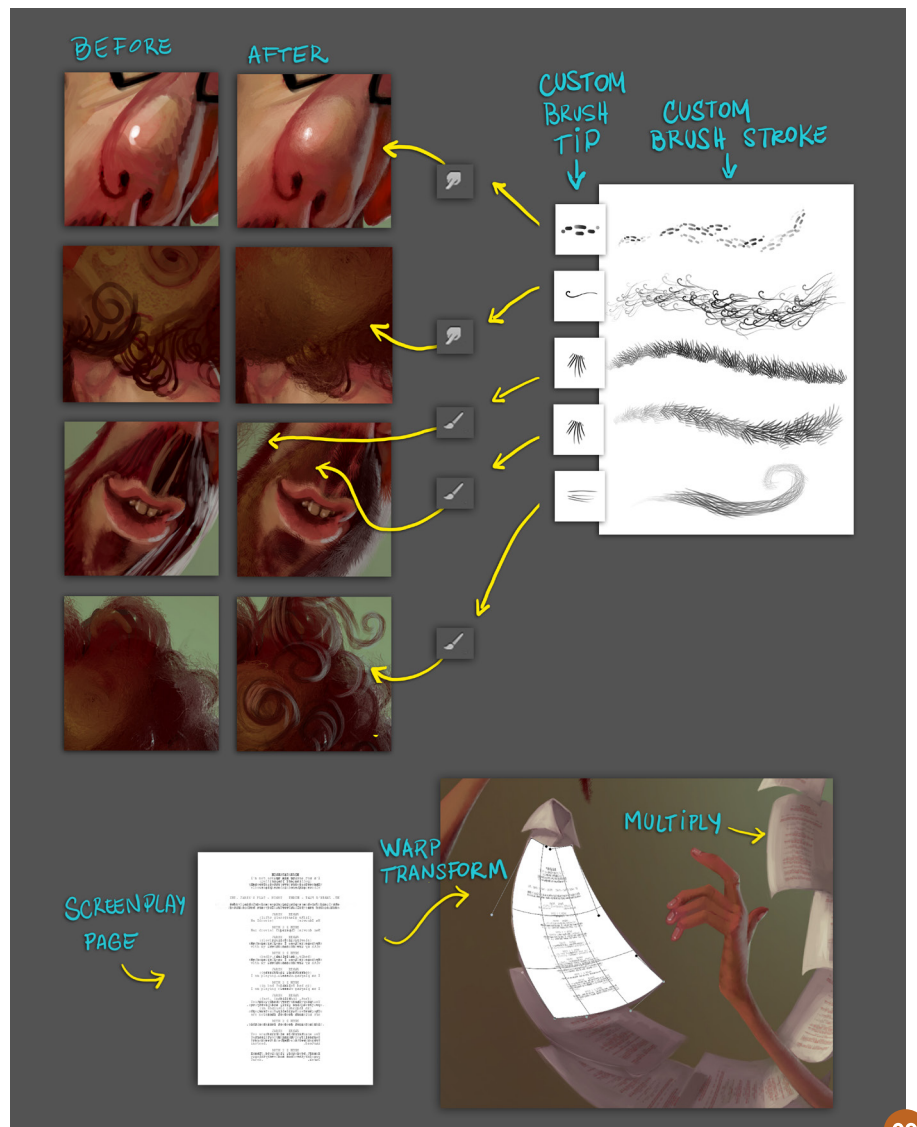
a Linear Dodge layer with a high value color. After this, we can add an Outer Glow filter to the layer using a highly saturated color as Linear Dodge,

and regulating the opacity. A Curves adjustment layer above everything can help to create a glazed effect, harmonizing the colors a little.

09 Some of the custom brushes used in the scene, and placement of the screenplay page

10 Adding adjustment layers to tweak the final lighting and color values

The Artist

Bruno Hamzagic
www.brunohamzagic.com

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The Artist

Miklós Földi
mikipetur.com

Software Used:
Painter, Photoshop

Miklós Földi was the winner of the Rising Stars contest organized by ImagineFX magazine in 2012, and is the holder of the Corel® Painter™ Master title. He's been working together with photographer Péter Nagy since 2011 and his work consists of combining traditional oil-painting and digital painting techniques.

Mastering portraits in Painter

Miklós Földi combines reality and mythology as he shares the workflow and techniques he used to create a traditional-looking painting in Painter ▶

Learn the skills and workflow to create painterly portraits using Painter...

This painting was inspired by Joe Hill's novel of the same title (*Horns*) and was made for

the express purpose of applying to ImagineFX magazine's Rising Stars contest. At first we were planning to create a complete series of mythological-themed paintings, but eventually the submission deadline only allowed us to finish a single painting. Our

purpose was to merge the borders of reality and mythology in order to make the everyday fantastic. This is why we chose a realistic portrait for the model and the ID-photo style.

⚡ PRO TIP
....

Advice for the novice Painter

If you are expecting good results from the complex Painter software, you need to practice, develop your skills and be devoted to what you do. Never stop experimenting and never lose your interest. There's a lot of potential in this program that you have to discover – it's only up to you!
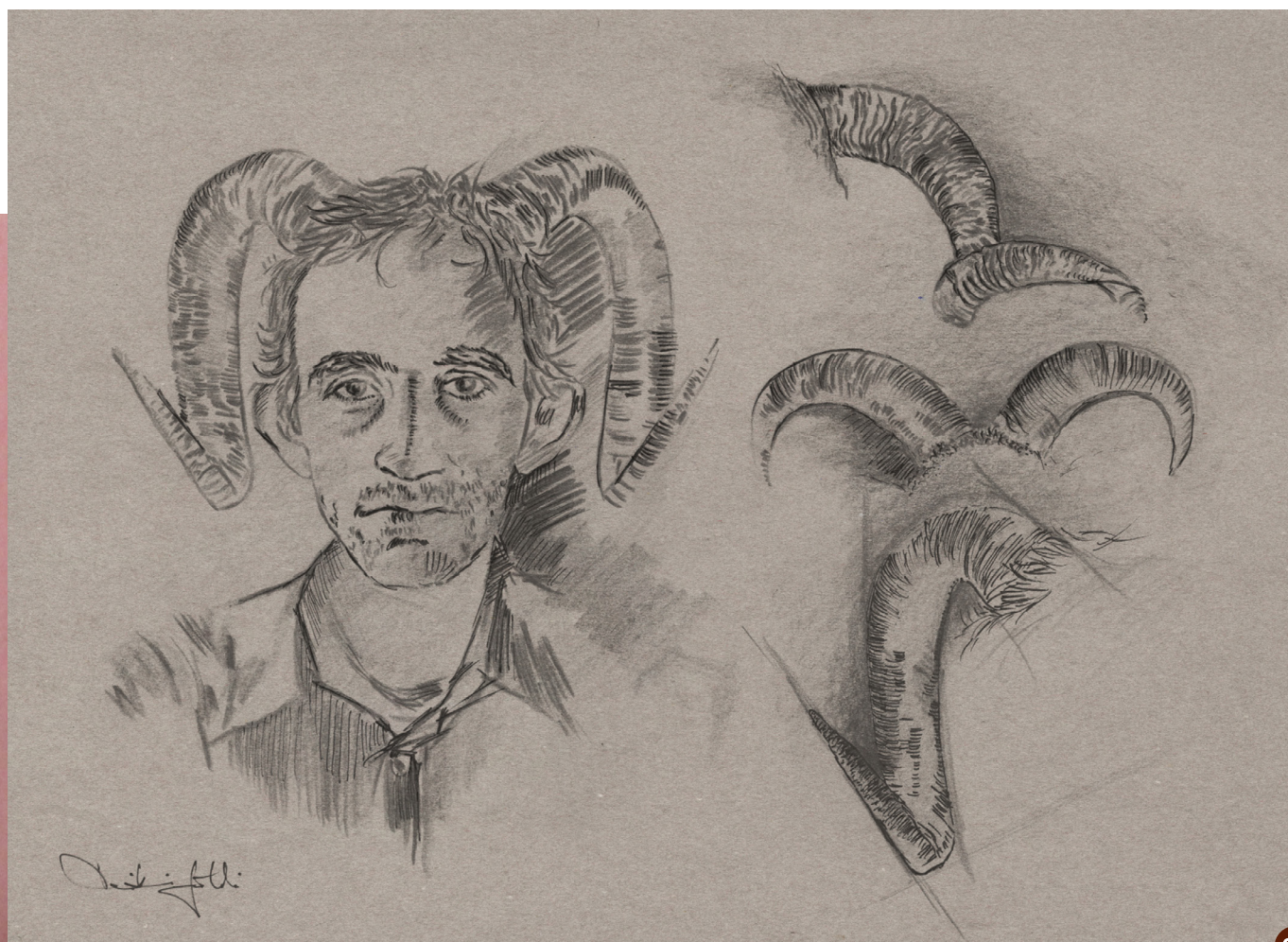
01 **Photo shoot:** Our model was a friend from the university, whose sharp features seemed perfect for a portrait.

While shooting we paid attention to the statuesque shadowing of the model's face. The shooting took place in a room without any studio conditions, under natural lighting circumstances. We also didn't use makeup in order to maintain the natural contrasts and create the mythological atmosphere. The photo was taken by Péter Nagy.

02 **Planning sketches:** Following the photo shoot I made several rough sketches. I looked through many reference pictures but I couldn't find an appropriate one, so I decided to make the additions on my own and drew the horn according to my own vision. ▶

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01 The model was Milán Rátosi, a music journalist from the university

02 Making traditional study sketches for the project
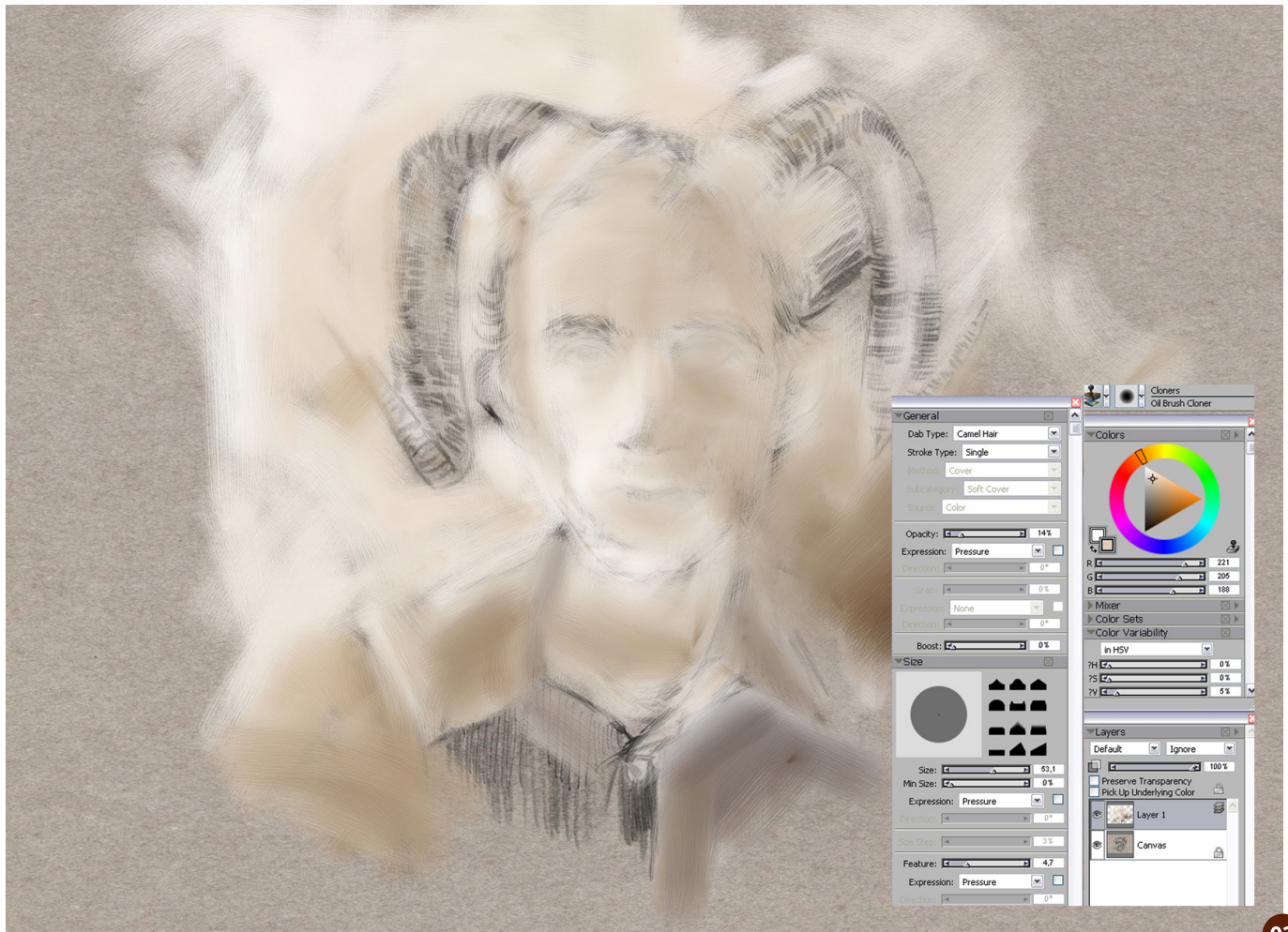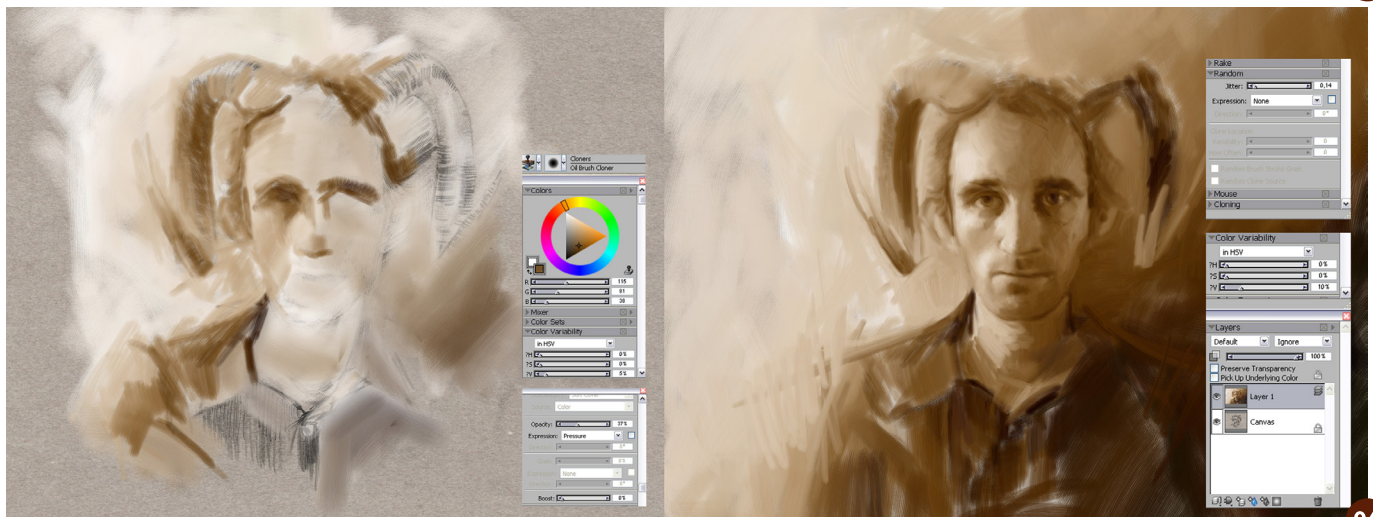
03 **Painting sepia:** I'm a traditional oil-painter, so I'm used to this stage of the process, regardless of whether it's a traditional or digital painting. For the priming I needed a new layer. After opening a new layer I chose the Oil Brush Cloner option (or another brush with the same effect). In this step, you can work with rough brushstrokes using an ochre color palette.

For the statuesque surface, I adjusted the opacity. The ground coat shouldn't reveal forms or contours, but should rather be about patching. That's why you should never focus on creating the details of your painting at this stage.

04 **Finishing the sepia layer:** I then developed the sepia layer. The opacity value was adjusted to a higher volume, and the Hue/Saturation/Value (HSV) of the Color Variability in the brushstroke was also changed. These settings modify the composition of the colors and are worth playing around with.

I used the Value set at 5-10%. I set the Random Jitter between 0.02 and 0.15, which allowed the brushstrokes to appear more 'radiating'. At this stage I used bright, vivid colors, structuring the contours and the patches according to the reference picture. For a dramatic effect, I focused on the contrast settings.

05 **Composing the colors:** For the composition of colors, a new layer was needed. For the face I used orange and pink

shades and gave the horns a dominant color. The light blues used for the shirt make a vivid contrast with the painting's darker background. I set the brush's HSV Color Variability to 5%, which made the strokes stronger.

06 **Background:** I used glossy brushstrokes for the background. For the vivid, vibrant effect I used blue, green and red in the shadowy parts of the painting, which highlighted the shirt's violet nuance.

07 **Perfecting the details:** I repainted the details with tiny strokes: the face, the eyes and the hair were redefined. For the background I used the Cloner and the Artists Impressionist brushes, which give the impression of a dynamic background. The natural movement in the hair was recreated using radiating brush techniques. The shirt and the horns were developed according to the reference photo.

To give the impression of a traditional oil-painting, I experimented with nuances and patches, for example; the violet cloud under the eyes and on the shirt, and the sharp brushstrokes in the background. This created a dynamic scene.
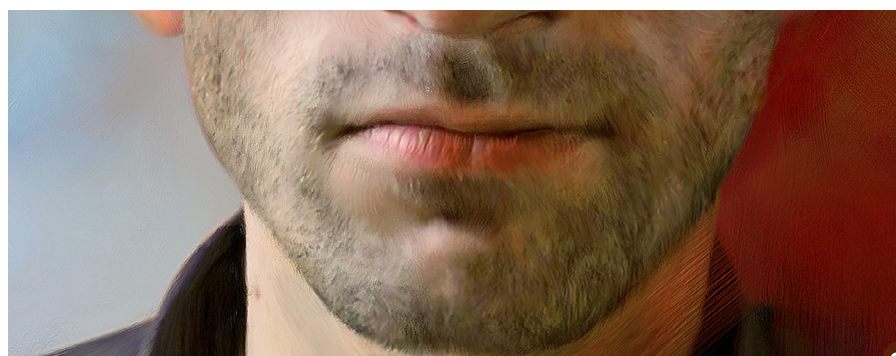
08 **Final touches:** For a dramatic impression, I chiseled the face's irregularities by placing stubble and wrinkles. Finally, small highlights were added. When the painting was ready, I opened the saved PSD file in Photoshop, and with the Smart Sharpen filter, I sharpened the picture on a new layer. You can also soften the sharpness by using the Undo Brush History tool. ●

03 Painting sepia tones with rough brushstrokes

04 Finishing the sepia layer by adjusting the settings

05 Adding a little color to the scene to define the content

06 More color creates a vivid, vibrant effect

07 Adding dynamic swirls of color can give the impression of an oil painting

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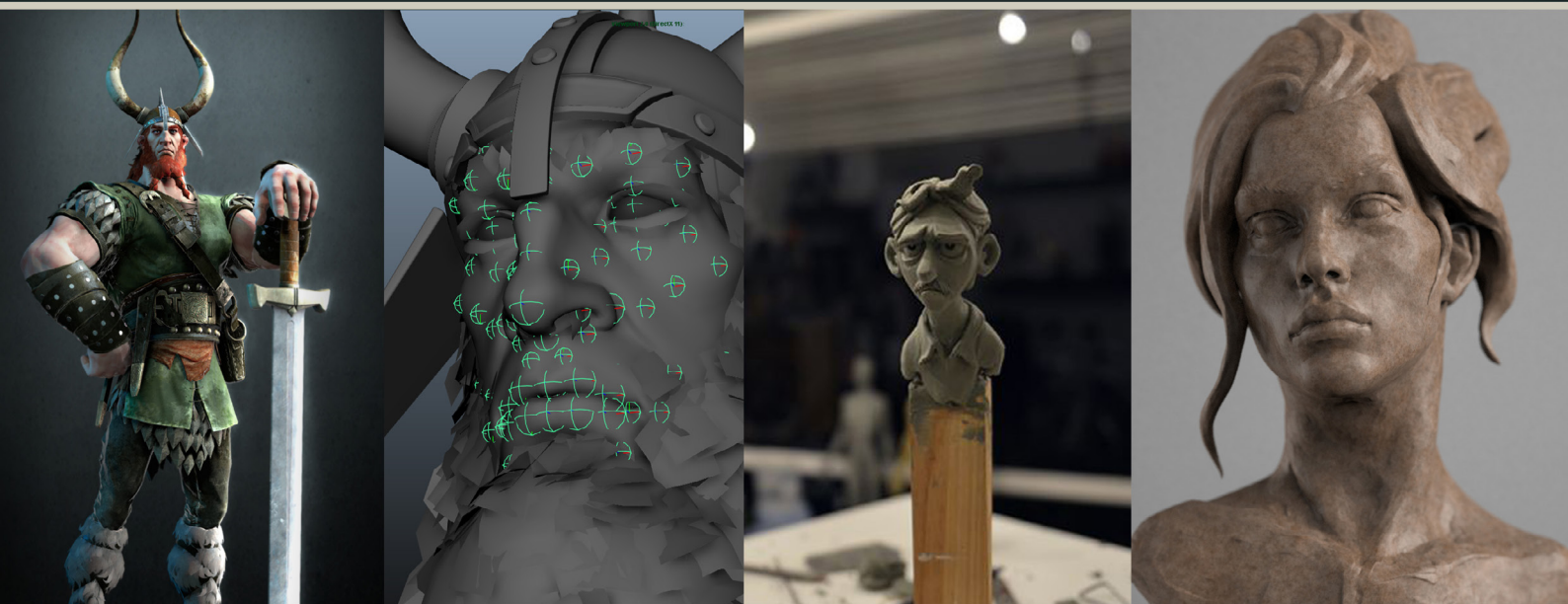
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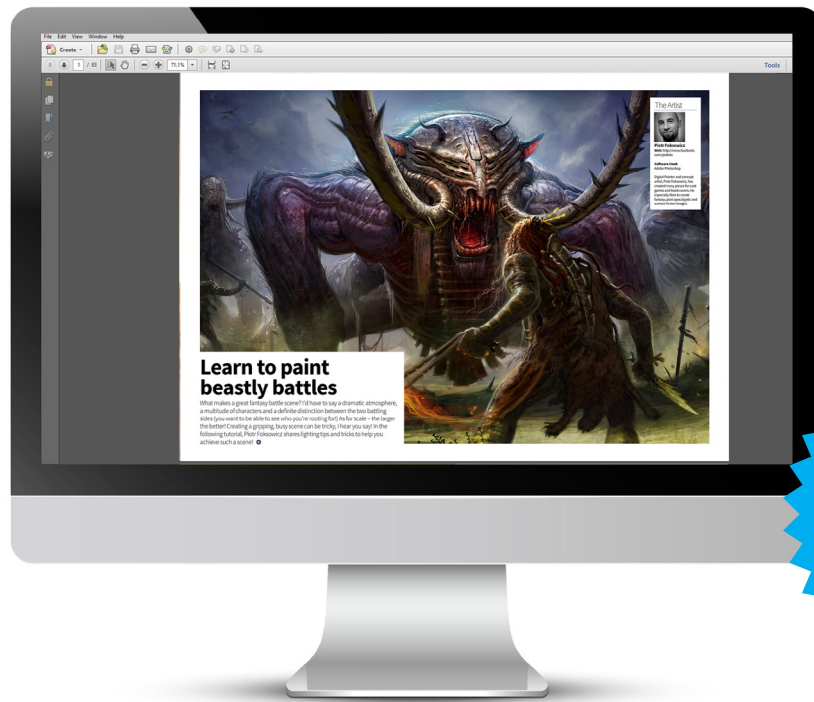
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The Artist

Massimo Porcella
saraknyal.blogspot.it

Software Used:
Photoshop

Massimo Porcella is a freelance concept artist, specializing in designing environments. Massimo has worked on several Italian and foreign projects, and is also an Environment Design teacher at the iMasterArt school of VFX based in Turin and Milan.

Create dynamic sci-fi scenes

Master sci-fi environment designer, Massimo Porcella, reveals a step-by-step breakdown of his workflow, sharing tips on how to achieve a balanced composition using color and textures ▶
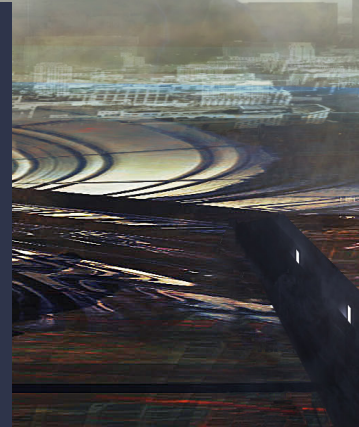
Discover how Massimo Porcella defines epic sci-fi scenes using real textures...

In this tutorial I will show you how I created and painted my sci-fi environment. I will start with the initial concept sketches using references, and then explain how I used colors, textures and brushes to create shapes for a balanced and complete composition.

01 **Concept sketch:** I started with simple sketching on the canvas. I painted stains and random shapes using the Round brush with a slightly softened edge as the main tool. Using the Lasso tool, I drew flat geometric shapes. Sometimes too, as in this case, I use photos as they give me a pre-made pattern as a base to work on.

I like to work this way at the beginning of a concept because I find that it gives my imagination more space to grow, allowing me

to work without any preconceived ideas about what I'm going to create. Once I began to see the final shapes in my mind, or started to find a way into what I had painted, I used a Flat brush and started to build and define them. The Flat brush is great for this purpose, as it gives structure to the geometric shapes, making them appear slightly architectural.

02 **Research and texturing:** Once I had determined the primary volumes, I began texturing the work using photographic research on the internet or gathering pictures taken by myself, with a mix of digital painting.

I usually prefer to take the reference material that I need from my own photos, because I think that

the final and complete work is more personal, unique and self-rewarding. Also, in my personal experience, taking a lot of pictures helps improve my knowledge of the composition of the image, ▶

01 **I create the plans of the composition with pictorial strokes and photos applied in Soft Light blending mode**

01
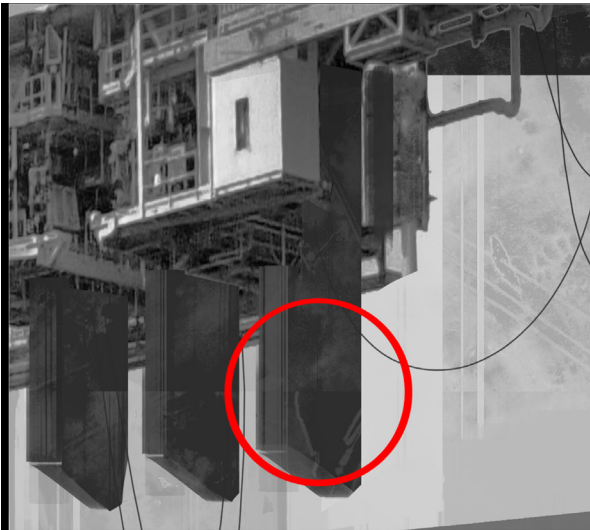
02

> **"To make the environment be more interesting and feel alive, I started to insert artificial light sources (both painted and manipulated) with a layer style-outer glow"**

the study of textures and more importantly, the study of light. Pictures are a good guideline to follow in the construction of the concept scene.

03 **Lighting and mood:** Once I had defined and given structure to the buildings, I focused on the main subject: in this case, I was inspired by a submarine. I studied its rounded shapes and its structure, and slightly modified it, turning it into a space ship. I kept its original texture as close as possible, because I did not want to lose its consistency.

At this point in the work I decided to fix the composition and start thinking more about studying the light and mood of the piece, creating

various color gradients in Soft Light or Overlay blending mode.

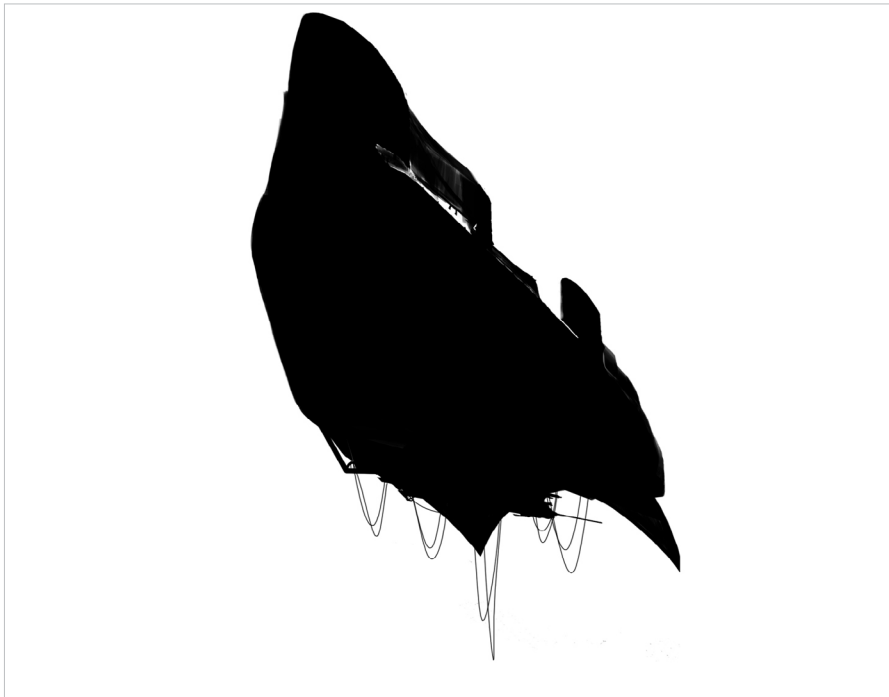**04** **Lights and contrasts:** To make the environment more interesting and feel alive, I started to insert artificial light sources (both painted and manipulated) with Layer Style > Outer Glow. I also used pictures of cities at night (in this case a photo of New York City) and applied them in various well-lit areas. This allowed me to hide the dark parts of the picture without affecting the bright ones.

Once I did this, I contrasted the image using Curves, trying to balance shadows, mid-tones and highlights the best I could. ▶

---

02 An example of painting and using textures applied to the volumes

03 The main silhouette of the spaceship inspired by a submarine, and the final scene composition

04 Adding light to the scene

03

04

05

06

05 **Base color:** I then began to apply the basic colors. In this concept I used two main colors: one for the structures and one for the sky and the atmosphere. I usually choose the color palette by observing pictures that have lights and mood similar to the idea I have in mind for my concept. In this case, I used two methods to create the base color: one using gradients and sampling the color directly from a photo; the other way was to superimpose a photo using Soft Light blending mode with low opacity, which not only colored but gave a slight pattern to the image, making everything a bit more alive.

I completed this step with Curves. Mixing colors with photographic textures allowed me to experiment with different blending modes in Photoshop, which in turn gave me more freedom of expression in the painting process.

When I was satisfied with the color base, I applied a layer of color above the whole image and by varying the opacity of it, I achieved the effect of atmospheric transparency, the so-called 'mood'.

06 **Layers of color and texture:** After getting the base color, I created some masks with Photoshop layers (in this case, three masks), defining a dark-tones area, a mid-

tones area and a highlights area. I worked in Soft Light blending mode at 50% Opacity on each of them, using a color pattern created specifically to texture these parts of the concept.

07 **Mood, light and color:** I acted in a more determined way on the mood, lights and colors. I began painting in Lighten and Color Dodge blending modes with a bluish color, sampling the artificial lights at the sides of the concept, then darkened some areas with color in Soft Light blending mode to begin defining and applying focal points where necessary.

I then added fumes or vapors. When painting sketched concepts, I usually use a Cloud or Smoke brush to give that special effect, but in a well-defined concept like this I prefer to use real textures. I started to look for photos of fires, erupting volcanoes, and explosions – anything that would contain a big smoke or cloud texture. Once I found the texture that best suited the purpose, I applied it on the affected part in Lighten blending mode and turned the Opacity down to around 20-25%. Then, with the Rubber Cloud brush, I defined the area of vapor/smoke.

08 **Final touches:** It was then time to put the finishing touches to the concept. I

darkened the entire image with a level of Curves and continued refining the mood. I also adjusted some parts of the concept that needed to be more or less defined.

I then intensified the shadows and the lights, and filled the scene with more mood, dissolving some parts with both Soft Light and Normal blending modes. This operation varies depending on the affected area; for example, if I have to work on the background I will sample the base color and in Normal mode, with low opacity, I'll dissolve it.

I used Soft Light blending mode with low Opacity to lighten some portions of the concept. In Soft Light, I accentuated the glow of artificial lights, defined a few small areas of steam and completed the concept by contrasting the image with Curves and then balancing the Opacity. ●

---

05 Once I had my base color, I applied a picture of the sky over the whole image

06 The dark-tone, mid-tone and highlighted areas of the image

07 The texture photo and brush used to create the vapor/smoke in the image

Texture photo

Brush

07

The Artist

Massimo Porcella
saraknyal.blogspot.it

The Artist
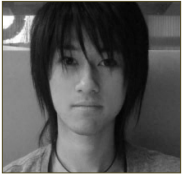
William Wu
www.wwudesign.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Bio:
William Wu specializes in visual development, environment, prop and character concept design and has worked on titles such as *Assassin's Creed III* and the popular card game, *Magic: The Gathering*.

DIGITAL ART MASTER:
New York Street
by William Wu

William Wu shares useful techniques for designing and painting scenes for videogames as he demonstrates how he created his image *New York Street*; an environment depicting 18th Century New York for popular title *Assassins Creed III* ▶

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Working as a concept artist for the videogame *Assassin's Creed III*, **I was asked by my director, Chinh Ngo, to create a scene depicting 18th Century New York. This environment would appear arid and dusty, in contrast to the Boston scenes used elsewhere.**

Research

Before jumping into any painting, I will spend a couple of hours researching the architecture and people of the period. I look into details like the type of window frames that would be used and the styles of decoration and clothing, for example. Doing this helps you focus when painting and will save you the time of having to go back and forth to figure things out.

To accommodate for heavy crowd traffic, the streets would have to be vast and wide. The terrain would be rough and filthy as horses were integral to transportation during the period. The image also needed to show the bustle of the 18th Century New York streets, with market stalls and vendors and residents wandering around.

Color palette

Once I have a basic idea in my head, I begin to think about the color palette that I would use to illustrate the dry, dusty streets. I choose warmer hues of red and yellow to convey this atmosphere (**Fig.01**).

After I have decided on my color palette, I start on a small and rough thumbnail sketch of the scene, which I then check with my director. This should not be larger than the size of a business card – if the image is readable at that size, then there should not be any problem selling that idea the final image.

Perspective and light

My next challenge is to create a symmetrical perspective without having the focus placed directly in the center (**Fig.02**). To guide the viewer's eye, I apply the rule of thirds in photography and place the area with the highest
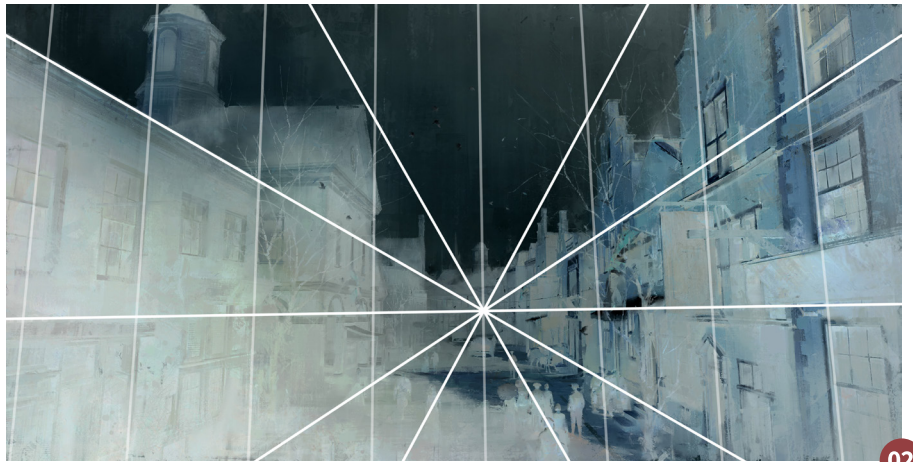
contrast along one of the overlapping points on the grid (**Fig.03**). This method can be very useful for beginner painters who have trouble initially with composition. This rule not only helps with finding the focal point, but can also be a useful guide as a cropping tool if you need to remove unnecessary areas.

Lighting is a very crucial part in any painting. It defines forms, shadows and strong silhouettes. Without a strong sense of light, it would be more difficult to know where the focus of the image is located. In this image, I have decided to place the

05

06

> **"Atmospheric fog is also great for creating depth and giving an air of mystery – it makes the audience want to explore more"**

light source on the left-hand side, just behind the shadowed architecture.

This light source gives me the opportunity to create a strong silhouette and a bright focal area. I tend to enjoy using later afternoon sunlight, simply because it allows me to play with the shape of the shadows. I always think about contrast in light or shape when I paint, as this creates a much stronger, more interesting look.

07

Adding detail

I continue to compose the image and break it down into three sections: first, second and third (**Fig.04**). The first holds most of the detail and contrast. I spend a lot of time on this, carefully painting each window, door and all the other objects, as it is this layer that the audience will scrutinize, so if these details aren't clear enough, it can undermine the rest of the painting. The second section contains less detailed elements,

which are not as important, but still add interest. Finally the third section is much less detailed and demands less time.

In order to create a sense of depth, I try to add as many overlapping elements as possible, placing dark shapes in front of light shapes and vice versa

(**Fig.05**). Atmospheric fog is also great for creating depth and giving an air of mystery – it makes the audience want to explore more.

Now the environment is established, I focus on the crowd and making the scene more exuberant and involving (**Fig.06**). Creating a sense of motion can illustrate scale, activity and narrative. Similarly, depicting smoke and wind can also add life to the image (**Fig.07**).

Finally, I check my values to see the range I have used and check if it could be pushed any further (**Fig.08**). I tend to have the widest range on my mid-tone value, while the darkest and lightest areas are used more conservatively, as the image begins to lose realism when pushed too far. Now happy with the values, the image is complete. ●

08

DIGITAL ART MASTERS
:VOLUME 8

"An integral part of my own drive for self improvement has always been admiring and scrutinizing the work of others. Getting to see brilliant works of art broken down and explained step-by-step is always a pleasure, and a captivating glimpse into the minds and processes of the artists behind them."

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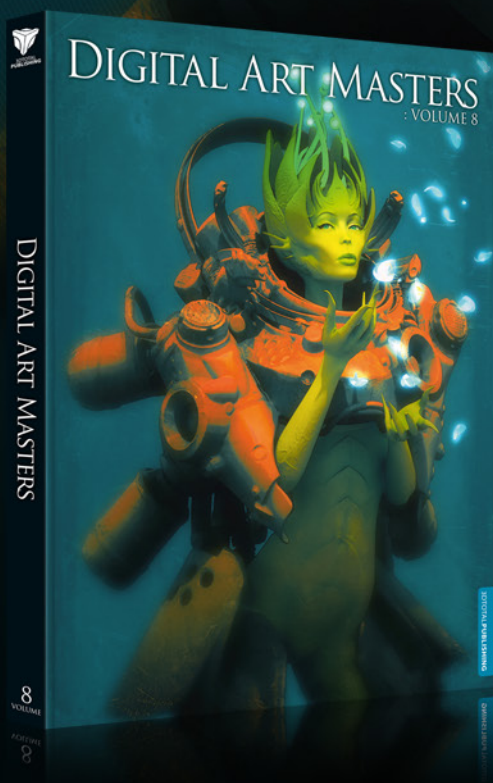
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